

NATIONAL CENTRE  
FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

राष्ट्रीय संगीत नाट्य केन्द्र

Quarterly Journal

Volume VIII

Number 3

September 1979



# NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

Quarterly Journal

Volume VIII

Number 3

September 1979

## CONTENTS

The Bauls: Communicators and Artists —Deepak Majumdar and Gaston Roberge	1
On Translations and Adaptations—P. L. Deshpande	15
Ramlila: Tradition and Styles—Induja Awasthi	23
Bertolt Brecht 80 (1898-1978)—Samik Bandyopadhyay	37
New and Notes	46
Book Reviews	55
Record Reviews	60

---

### Cover Picture :

Pavan Das Baul and, behind him, Choto Dinabandhu Das Baul in a Birbhum forest, January 1978.

Photograph by Vivek Benegal (C) Chitrabani 1979.

The contributors to this number include:

Fr. Gaston Roberge, Director, and Deepak Majumdar, Studies Co-ordinator, of *Chitrabani*, a centre for studies and training in communication media, Calcutta.

P. L. Deshpande, eminent theatre personality; formerly Vice-President, Sangeet Natak Akademi.

Dr. Induja Awasthi, author of *Remile: Parampara aur Shailiyan*.

Samik Bandyopadhyay, drama critic and Co-ordinator of the Festival, Bertolt Brecht 80.

## The Bauls: Communicators and Artists

Deepak Majumdar and Gaston Roberge

For centuries the Bauls of West Bengal have embodied in their life style and broadcast in their songs a very articulate counter-culture. Today, industrialization and urbanization, with large components of a Western-like culture, have set in crisis the traditional ethos which the Bauls have relentlessly countered. In particular, the spiritual framework provided by that ethos is disintegrating. What are the Bauls to counter now? Can they define themselves on their own terms? How will they react to the assimilative influence of the technological mass media?

Answering these questions is essential because they relate to the core of the cultural crisis in West Bengal—with possible applications to the whole of India. A cultural crisis is not merely a matter for debate. It is essentially a redefinition of man and of the humane in given circumstances. In this redefinition are at stake not man in general, but this man, here and now, his spiritual freedom and the quality of his experience of life. In other words, it is a redefinition of self, and, therefore, a choice and a responsible act.

As members of Chitrabani, a centre for training and experimenting in the use of audio-visual media in support of educational and developmental programmes, we have been interested in the Bauls for some time now, but our approach departs somewhat from the academician's approach and it has nothing to do with the inquisitive tourist's approach. We are not interested in documenting 'strange' ways of life, as if the Bauls were mere objects arousing curiosity. Nor are we interested in producing a statistical, descriptive or even interpretative, discussion of the present cultural crisis as it is experienced by the Bauls. We do not wish to be mere observers. We value the human experience of the Bauls, we value ours, and we believe that an interaction between the two can benefit both the Bauls and ourselves. That is why the approach to the questions we formulated at the beginning cannot have, in our view, the detachment and apparent indifference of the so-called academic studies. We believe that the approach has to be *holistic*, wilfully trespassing the boundaries of conventional scholarly disciplines, and taking the risk as well as the responsibility of the particular weaknesses which are bound to hinder the generalist. Furthermore, the approach to the subject has to be *committed*, again taking the risk and the responsibility of its conscious or unconscious biases. The approach, finally, must be open. The attempt at a qualitative assessment of man in his milieu must be a process in which the student grows with his studied subject. Our reflection on the Bauls and the present cultural crisis amounts to inserting ourselves into the vital processes at work in contemporary society, with the confidence that as a result of this insertion our own vision of man and we ourselves will be enriched and enlarged. At the same time, we are confident that we can contribute to inflecting these socio-cultural processes in favour of man.

The views expressed in the Quarterly Journal of the National Centre for the Performing Arts are those of the authors and do not necessarily conform to the views of the publishers. Permission to reproduce, in whole or part, any material published in this Journal must be obtained from the Executive Director, National Centre for the Performing Arts, Nariman Point, Bombay-400 021.

Price: Rs. 7.50 India: £1 United Kingdom: \$3 U.S.A.

### Who are the Bauls?

The Bauls of West Bengal, of some adjacent states of Eastern India, and of Bangladesh are wandering minstrels perpetuating a mystical tradition known as *Sahajiya*—*sahaj* meaning direct, distinct, concrete. No one knows how many Bauls there are in this area but it is estimated that a yearly festival like the one held at Kenduli, Birbhum, draws at least 10,000 of them from various parts of West Bengal. Their origin may be traced back to the remote pre-Aryan days of the eastern nomadic outcasts who, in the *Atharva-Veda*, were considered to be 'fallen' people.<sup>1</sup> They were 'fallen' because they believed that the sexual relationship between man and woman reveals an aspect of man's search for God. Since not much is known about those 'fallen' or *vratya* people and their spiritual life, scholars satisfy themselves with the view that the origin of the Bauls may be related to the Buddhist—Tantric faith prevalent in Bengal during the four hundred year reign of the Pala kings from A.D. 700 to 1100.<sup>2</sup>

Certain esoteric rituals having an emancipatory effect on man's view of life were widely practised in the three major paths of the Buddhist-Tantric faith. These three paths were *Vajrajan*, the hard path of indestructible inner light, *Kalachakrajan*, the path of the wheel of time, and antithesis of the indestructible light; and *Sahajjan*, the direct path, thus qualified in terms of man. The first two paths offer a duality of indestructibility and destructibility and the third path, a human measure. They may also be viewed as essence, existence and man, respectively.<sup>3</sup>

Filtered through various spiritual movements having their focus on man, the *Sahajiya* faith found its final expression in the Bauls in the beginning of the 17th century A.D. These influences were: (a) Sufism, under the patronage of the Islamic rulers of Bengal in the late 11th century A.D.; (b) the Vaishnava Movement led by Chaitanya in the 15th century A.D.; and (c) various other obscure mystical cults of Fakirs and Darveshis and also the vision of life expressed by the medieval saints like Kabir, Dadu and Ramdas. The esoteric Buddhist-Tantric practices remained, giving a foundation to the Bauls' philosophical concept of duality in non-duality. The Vaishnava poets provided a form of narration and an aesthetic praxis that enabled the Bauls to deal with this concept. Radha's love of Krishna is seen by the Bauls as a longing of the alienated part (Radha) for the human essence (Krishna), for the whole man.

Ramananda Das Baul of Birbhum sings:

*Dear bird in the cage of my heart, chant the names of Radha and Krishna, please.*  
*My beast-life will disappear and Paramatma will come and sit in my body-jar,*  
*My own nature will vanish and I will not have any want.*  
*Dear bird in the cage of my heart, chant the names of Radha and Krishna, please.*

*There are sixteen names in thirty-two letters,*  
*Take twenty-eight out, cling to the four that remain and*



*That is the ajapa nam (the unsingable name) in four letters.  
The Sadhu sings that name, the jib (the physical human) doesn't  
know it.*

*Dear bird in the cage of my heart, chant the names of Radha  
and Krishna, please.*

*I sang that unsingable name  
When I was in my mother's womb  
But while sucking her breasts I forgot everything.  
Dear bird in the cage of my heart, chant the names...*

*Gossain Premananda says: Whom to tell the story of my mind?  
My sorrows remain in my mind  
I know my mind but not the man (the living embodiment) of my mind.  
Dear bird in the cage of my heart, chant Radha-Krishna, please.\**

In order to rejoin the whole and to objectify his search for God the best means open to man would be to strive for a realization of that supreme longing through the medium of a co-searcher. For, the longing of man of which Radha's longing is an image must be fully experienced not as an imaginary process but in the reality of human life.<sup>4</sup>

#### *The Bauls' search*

An achieved Baul is real man in his quintessence. A Baul constantly aspires to reach within himself his supreme essence. His insatiable hunger for his innermost self finds release in an expressionistic form which in turn shapes his personality and his life style. He learns to observe reality and to question it with the help of a guru and a co-searcher. He transcends his socio-economic constraints through an aesthetic praxis.

Thus sings Pavan Das, a twenty year old Baul from Birbhum:

*Who knows the innermost mind of the Fakir in our mind?  
Only my guru knows it. Only he knows who knows  
Chillies grow on bamboo trees and cucumbers on the  
aubergine plants*

*Who knows the innermost mind of the Fakir in our mind?*

*In the morning the wedding arrangements took place,  
At noon was the wedding,  
On the evening the bride comes home with a baby  
in her arms,*

*Who knows the innermost mind of the Fakir in our mind?*

*The plough works in the field,  
The calf is in the womb of the cow,  
Krishna was born and he has just gone to the fields  
to get his food.*

*Who knows the innermost mind of the Fakir in our mind?*





*There is no water in the sea,  
But there are wild waves in the bazaar.  
Who knows the innermost mind of the Fakir in our mind?*

*When the Father was not born  
The son had a bride sitting on his lap.  
All the Fakirs came from faraway lands,  
There was a huge, torn blanket covering the sky  
And, now, where will I bury that Father Fakir,  
The one who knows, after he dies?  
Who knows the innermost mind of the Fakir in our mind?\**

#### *The Bauls' style of life*

The word 'Baul' means "frenzied", "in a state of trance" or "wild wind". With his long, tattered robe, a vest with multi-coloured patches (borrowed from the Sufi, Fakir and Darvesh traditions), a scarf around his waist, a piece of cloth like a lungi covering the lower part of his body (loose enough to allow fast and sudden movements), a headgear (on special occasions) and any other object with which he has formed a personal relationship, the Baul distantiates himself from society. He loves his body and cares very much about how he looks but not in a narcissistic manner. The Baul is a sincere communicator and his care for his appearance is part of his communication strategy. Since his childhood he has been made aware of the exemplary function of his existence, which is to create an image of, firstly, a search for the supreme and, secondly, an image of the supreme itself, that is, Radha-Krishna-in-one or Purusha-Prakriti.

The wandering Baul may be seen carrying one or several of the following instruments:

- (1) *Ektara*, a one-stringed drone instrument;
- (2) *Anandalahari* or *Gubgubi* or *Khamak*, a drum with a pair of gut or nylon strings attached to the skin of one side of the drum, which is open on the other side. The other end of the strings are tied to another, much smaller, drum. The Baul holds the smaller drum in his left hand and, loosening or tightening the strings, he controls the variation of pitch as he plucks the strings with the other hand;
- (3) *Dotara*, a four-stringed lute;
- (4) *Dugi*, a drum tied to his waist;
- (5) *Kartal*, or *mandira*, small cymbals made of brass;
- (6) *Ghungur*, small bells, often attached to the ankles;
- (7) *Dubki*, tambourine.

#### *The Bauls' manner of communication*

Usually the Baul searches for a *Sadhan Sengi*, a companion in the same meditation praxis, who shares all his 'worldly spiritual' concerns. The female partner is known as *Vaishnabi*. This two-person troupe then starts an intense apprenticeship of frenzied, spectacular, communication styles

which include singing, dancing, tranced histrionics and other esoteric meditation enactments. Since they have a strong community orientation, the Bauls are in constant touch with the rural mainstream of Eastern India and, thus, are sensitive to local social, cultural, and economic issues. This enables them to concretize among the rural folk the basic human dialectic of commitment towards theory and praxis, towards God and World. They perform at ground level and maintain eye contact with their audience. The latter are drawn in an effort at embodying in their life-experience the longing for a heavenly Vrindaban. This secret Vrindaban is known to the initiates in the audience. Out of that Vrindaban they feel like the Hebrews out of their Holy Land, or like the Christians longing for heavenly Jerusalem. The Baul's performance quickens the desires of those longing souls, who yearn for Vrindaban as if they were in an emotional diaspora. And the Baul urges them on, calls upon them to return to Vrindaban. The whole performance is an exercise in elevating oneself from the level of intellectual metaphor to that of experiential sacrament.<sup>5</sup> The Yin and the Yang of each member of the audience unite in an experience of tranquillity which is not a catharsis, but a conscious perception of unity. The dialectical pairs of existence, the either/ors of life merge into a higher organic unity.

#### *The Bauls' aesthetic praxis*

The Bauls are artists, just as Zen Koan writers are artists. They are not Vaishnavas, in the same way as Zenists are not Buddhists. The Bauls strive at transforming human reality radically. On a concrete historical level they seek to transform a society which is caste-ridden, class-structured and exploitative of its members, and establish a society in which humanity can give free rein to its essential powers, chained for so long. Baul art is a practical activity.

*Lalan says: Dear wild mind of mine, I am yet to know what caste is.  
People ask: What is Lalan's caste in the family of man?*

*A Moslem is known by his circumcision.  
How do we know his woman?  
A Brahmin is known by his sacred thread.  
How do we recognize the female Brahmin?  
People ask: What is Lalan's caste in the family of man?*

*Some have flower garlands around their neck  
Some, icons.  
Dear mind, how do you see the world?  
Does all this tell you about the caste differences?*

*How can the caste be determined in the coming and going of life?  
If the water is in the well, we call it well-water,  
If it is in the Ganges, it is Ganga-water.  
In essence it is the same water.  
Only the names are different.  
All over the world people pride themselves at random  
on the caste differences among themselves.*



*But Lalen has already swallowed up the head of caste.  
He has sold himself to the world. Oh! dear wild mind,  
how do you understand all this?\**

It is the creation or restoration of a new reality (exterior or interior) to a human measure. It is not the mirage of Radha-Krishna or Juganaddha, that inspires the soul of the Baul. Like his black American counterparts, the Blues and Jazz musician, the Baul believes very strongly that he is responsible to God and to self. These exemplary forms of aesthetic praxis cannot be defined analytically. They can only be approached with an open aesthetic conception which does not mutilate the richness, diversity and dynamism of their art-acts. The *Sahaj* path of the Bauls calls for a *sahaj* approach. And thus, an interaction with the Baul tradition may contribute to the creation of 'another' culture.

#### *The Bauls and modern media*

The Bauls are amongst the best communicators in rural Bengal. Development officers have already become aware of this and they have started to examine how they can 'use' the Bauls in the service of their programmes.<sup>6</sup> Political demagogues have also attempted to 'use' the Bauls. And mass media have put a number of Bauls 'on the air'.<sup>7</sup> In the hands of media men, politicians or development agents the Bauls are being manipulated, often subtly but not seldom crudely. This manipulation results in a confrontation between a pragmatic, utilitarian, form of communication and an aesthetic one. To the extent that they are aesthetic forms, the folkloric media are not meant to convey messages extraneous to themselves. They have their own source of inspiration: the life-experience of a people, and they fulfil their own essential function: to express the soul of a people, to arrive at a vision of life and share this vision with the community.<sup>8</sup> When attempts are made to assimilate the folk media and make of them 'extension arms of the mass media'<sup>9</sup>, there can only result a cultural conflict and the necessity of a cultural struggle.

A culture is the collective personality of a group, that is, a group's particular manner of "being-in/to-the-world". And communications are the particular manner in which the members of a group relate among themselves and with other groups. For instance, Baul communication, as was mentioned already, is dialogical, horizontal, participatory and emancipatory. It is basically democratic. It also has its technique, that of oral communication as opposed to written communication. Oral communication implies a face-to-face situation and a direct mediation of words, where words do not *refer* to particular realities so much as *stand for* these realities.<sup>10</sup> Thus, Baul communication favours collective participation and emphasizes immediacy of experience. As can be seen by this example, at the heart of culture is communication, and communication is wedded to a particular value-system and supports it.<sup>11</sup> However, a group has a right to change its culture, as a person has a right to alter his/her personality. It is not change that is dangerous but the fact that a change is forcibly—however gently and persuasively—brought about by an external influence and is not fully understood, thus mastered by those concerned.

The Baul, as a communicator, is essentially alien to the media man, to the political or developmental harbinger. The latter on the one side, and the Bauls on the other, propagate cultures which are not only alien, but exclusive of each other. The encounter of the two cultures can only result in the disappearance, absorption or falsification of one of the two. In the case of the Bauls vs the mass media, the dice are thrown, the protagonists have taken their positions. But the game or drama to ensue is not a matter of chance. The action follows laws that are almost as ineluctable as physical laws. One might be inclined to forecast the death—spiritual and otherwise—of the Bauls and their subsequent accession to the rarefied atmosphere of museums and academicism . . . but a number of facts indicate that the Bauls' faith in the emancipation of man and their resilience in the face of alien cultural trends should not be underestimated:

- (a) Repeated attempts at organizing centrally controlled programmes have never succeeded with the Bauls.<sup>12</sup> They strongly favour a decentralized festival system with events all over Eastern India throughout the year. These festivals follow a heterodox socio-religious calendar. This is done, of course, in addition to the Bauls' usual rounds in their immediate environment.
- (b) The Bauls' aesthetic praxis calls for an interaction of those involved, each receiver being also a potential transmitter. Bauls cannot accept a passive consumer behaviour not any more than uni-directional communication.
- (c) They never miss the opportunity of practising a form of political enlightenment as opposed to obscurantism—with its depoliticising tendency. At each and every one of their long sessions the Bauls engage in a manner of dialogue known as *Paltapalti* or repartee.
- (d) This dialogical process ensures collective production and works against any attempts at specialized production that may be thrust upon the Bauls.
- (e) Of course, there is a shadow elite among the Bauls—there always has been—imposed by the manipulations of the larger elite of society. But the Bauls by their ingenious elusiveness have survived those situations in the past and they are doing so at present. The future will depend upon the ability of the collective Baul leadership which is loose but functional enough to strengthen their self-organization and to withstand any coercion coming from outside.
- (f) The Bauls are becoming aware of the cultural and political energies contained in their vision of society. They are even showing signs of an astute awareness, one which protects them from being manipulated by the new media and even incites them to control the image they project in those media.

#### Conclusion

In this preliminary article we have defined our subject, stated what we believe to be the main issues in its respect, and described our method of studying it. A large number of questions now arise which we propose to examine in the next few months by means of (a) frequent field trips for ob-







servation of and dialogue with the Bauls; (b) *Baul-utsava-s* held in our premises where Bauls will perform for urban audiences interested in a dialogue with them, and (c) interdisciplinary discussions of the material gathered during the field trips and the *utsava-s*. Some of the questions which we can already formulate are as follows:

- (1) What are the main tenets of the Baul philosophy/an experience of life which man in crisis might do well to preserve?
- (2) What are the main characteristics of the Bauls' communication performances? How are these characteristics wedded to a particular view of man, and how do they interact with the non-participatory, non-emancipatory, totalitarian, technological media of communication?
- (3) Can it be that progress and, more topically, development means preserving some of the values of the Bauls even at the cost of rejecting or at least minimising certain values which have become paradigms of development?
- (4) How can the dialectical Baul philosophy of duality in non-duality help counter the excessive digitalisation<sup>13</sup> (either/or type of questioning) in the field of human sciences?

#### References

1. *Bengler Baul* (in Bengali) by Upendranath Bhattacharya, Orient Book Company, 1364 Bengali Calendar, pp. 133-290.  
In this monumental work on the Bauls the author discusses in detail the possible Vedic origin of the Baul philosophy. He refers to the following sources:  
Winternitz: *History of Indian Literature*; Niharranjan Ray: *Bengler Itihas*; Farquhar: *An Outline of the Religious Literature in India*; Bhandarkar: *Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Minor Religious Systems*; *Atharvaveda Samhita*, Book XIV, *The Vratya*.
2. *Bengler Baul*, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-244.
3. *Obscure Religious Cults* by Shashibushan Dasgupta, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1962, pp. 165-166.  
"The earlier Sahajiyas conceived of the ultimate reality as the Sahaja and this conception of Sahaja is also found in the songs of the Bauls; and like the earlier Sahajiyas the Bauls also advocate the most natural path for the realization of this Sahaja-nature..."  
But the earlier Sahajiya cult underwent a notable transformation in the hands of the Bauls; for, the Bauls, by deviation and innovation, effected a great change both in the ideology and practice of the Sahajiyas. The difference in ideology is palpable in the conception of Sahaja. The Buddhist Sahajiyas conceived Sahaja as Maha-sukha which is the unity of the duality represented by man and woman as Upaya and Prajna. The method for the realization of this Sahaja consisted, therefore, essentially in a saxo-yogic practice... But the Bauls conceived Sahaja as the innermost eternal beloved who is the 'man of the heart' (*maner manus*). The Bauls also speak of love and union, but this love means love between the human personality and the Divine Beloved. Within and in this love man realises his union with the Divine, or in other words he merges his personal existence in the Beloved that resides within this temple of the body."
4. "It is through the medium of human form that the divine beauty is to be realised." Lalan Fakir, the celebrated Baul of mid-nineteenth century Bengal, sang: "In man resides that Jewel of Man, but ah me, that Jewel I could not recognize." *Obscure Religious Cults*, *op. cit.*, p. 184.
5. Gregory Bateson: *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, N. Y. Ballantine, 1972; See Metalogue: 'Why a Swan?', Gaston Roberge: *Films for an Ecology of Mind*, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1978, p. 46.
6. Official signboards are seen in Birbhum, West Bengal, welcoming the visitor to the 'land of the Bauls'. Tourism publicity uses the image of the Baul both at the state and at the central levels. There is a long practice of political parties belonging either to the right or to the left 'using' the Bauls to give a 'grassroot' character to their cultural fronts. A veteran Baul from Birbhum attended Congress sessions in the early fifties under the recommendation of a socio-political elite. His son was sent to Eastern Europe around that time by another socio-political elite, and lately he has been extensively travelling in the U.S.A. and other parts of the world, patronized by both the elites.

7. Quite a number of Bauls broadcast their songs on the AIR. Professional radio singers also sing Baul songs. In fact one such singer from Bangladesh radio, Runa Laila, may be responsible for the recent revival of the popularity of Baul songs on the radio in both the Bengalis. The multi-dimensionality of a Baul performance is lost in these broadcasts, and a significant increase in radio programmes featuring Bauls has both merits and demerits in terms of what we have called the aesthetic praxis of the Bauls. Films have also been made which included one or more Bauls performing the role of *vivak* or a choric commentator on life. An exceptional case for its awareness would be Ritwick Ghatak's *Jukti Takko Gappo*. In March–April 1979, a French television team made a documentary film on the Bauls. The Bauls greatly contributed to the quality of the film.
8. Gaston Roberge: *Mediation, the action of the media in our society*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1979.
9. Cf. S. Permar: *Traditional Folk Media in India*, Geka Books, New Delhi, 1975, p. 13.
10. Cf. "Literacy as a communication skill" by R. N. Srivastava, in *Indian Journal of Adult Education*, Vol. 40, No. 3, Mar. 79, pp. 1-14.
11. Cf. "Mass Media and National Culture" by Antonio Pasqueli, in *Media Asia, an Asian Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1978, pp. 62-67.
12. There are a few Bauls who have been abroad during the last two decades. They are in the habit of using titles like 'The King of the Bauls', 'London-returned Baul Butterfly', 'The Jewel of the Bauls'. There is a tradition of giving titles to veteran Bauls. These titles usually evolve out of the consensus at repeated festivals, but the new epithets are mere results of the Western media publicity culture. One of these not-yet-forty Bauls has organized an International Forum for Bauls. On the working committee of this Forum are local administrators, the vice-chancellors of two universities in the State of West Bengal, lawyers, two ministers of the State Government, two newspaper magnates, a group of academicians, writers and even a magician. This Forum has acquired a large piece of land and has repeatedly requested Bauls to participate in its yearly festivals but in vain. Only a handful of Bauls have responded to this call. When asked about the reason for this poor response, a veteran Baul replied: "We cannot sell ourselves, a Baul only sells himself to the person residing inside".
13. Cf. Gaston Roberge: *Films for an Ecology of Mind*, op. cit., pp. 82, 138-141; Anthony Wilden: *System and Structure*, Tavistock, London, 1972, *passim*.

\* Song translated by Deepak Majumdar.

#### List of Pictures

1. *Bheba Pagla, a spiritual guru belonging to the Shakta cult, has composed innumerable songs. He is seen here listening to one of his own songs interpreted by his disciple Baul Subal Das. (May, 1978)*  
Photograph by Salim Paul (C) Chitrabani 1979.
2. *Bipad Baran Das Baul at Kenduli Festival, Birbhum, West Bengal, January 1978.*  
Photograph by Salim Paul (C) Chitrabani 1979.
3. *Vaishnabi Savitri Dasi singing with accompaniment of Anandalahari, January 1978.*  
Photograph by Salim Paul (C) Chitrabani 1979.
4. *Pavan Das Baul, Kenduli, January 1978.*  
Photograph by Salim Paul (C) Chitrabani 1979.
5. *A child Baul at Kenduli Festival, January 1978.*  
Photograph by Salim Paul (C) Chitrabani 1979.

## On Translations and Adaptations

P. L. Deshpande

A lot of important problems arise when we discuss translations or adaptations. People generally believe that it is exceedingly difficult to render the humour of the original into another language. But this kind of difficulty is not confined to comedy alone. There are certain elements in a culture which simply rule out attempts at adaptation. For example, I translated *Oedipus Rex* into Marathi. I could never have dreamt of adapting it. The whole structure of a Greek myth and the elements of the irrational (which form so intrinsic a part of any culture) do not lend themselves to transposition into another culture. Can the *Ramayana* be adapted for European readers? Where would they find parallels in their culture for a king with three queens, a son fulfilling a promise made by his father, a wife following her husband into exile? When no parallels are to be found in the

A scene from *Teen Paishacha Tamasha*



culture of a people for whom a work is intended, the wisest course is to concentrate on a faithful rendering, on the near-impossible task of conveying the poetic quality of the original. This is what I sought to do in *Oedipus Rex*: to capture the poetry of the play, to bring alive the cruel play of Fate. I don't know if I succeeded. My translation is based on English versions, Sombhu Mitra's Bengali rendering. In fact, it was the tremendous impact of Sombhu's performance and of his version of the play which triggered off the idea of translating it into Marathi. It could be that some of the spirit of the original disappeared during this journey.

I recall an interesting episode after I finished translating *Oedipus*. I read it out to my friend, Vasant Rao Deshpande, the well-known singer and actor. He mentioned it to his mother. She came out with one of our own *Satvai* stories which included several ingredients similar to the *Oedipus* myth. Just imagine what would have happened had I heard the *Satvai* legend first and based a play on the story. People would have said I had borrowed elements from *Oedipus Rex* and placed them in an Indian setting!

In the sphere of comedy, what can be adapted with a fair amount of success are situations. It is possible to conceive of parallel situations in our milieu and make them credible. But what is difficult to convey is the nuance, the unexpected use in the original work of a word in a particular context and situation. To find such a word evoking the same kind of response in our own language is well-nigh impossible.

The three plays I adapted had a strong core of social criticism, and while reading the originals, I could at once see parallel situations in our culture. The first one was Gogol's *Inspector General*. Even as I read it, I could imagine the same events happening here. In a tiny princely state (which I called Surungwad), a little after the merger. I could visualize such characters and their operations in that small state. The pair (Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky), I made them into those stock characters of our earlier plays—two Brahmins. And I did so for a very good reason. I had to think of a kind of profession, which allowed free and unhindered entry into any home. Brahmins had this advantage (and also the barber to some extent since he used his razor on a king and a commoner). The pair of Brahmins came in handy. They made a comic twosome; they became purveyors of news and gossip. In a sense, the Brahmin was unproductive and, as a social entity, dispensable. Even so, he had his place in the scheme of things and that was enough for my purpose. Besides, I had our own tradition sanctioning the use of this team as a source of comedy and the two served as a vehicle for conveying exactly what Gogol's two landowners did. So, in this sense, it was easy to transpose the comic element into our setting.

But a real problem does arise when the humour is wholly rooted in the particular culture of a social segment of a country. The humour of P. G. Wodehouse, for example, is wholly untranslatable. If one has at one's command the resources of language he had, one can at best be inspired to write in his vein. But to adapt him is out of the question.

Certain transpositions come naturally. There is in Gogol that reference to the History teacher who forgets himself and speaks with such fervour

when describing Alexander the Great that one might think the whole place was on fire. In our Marathi context, a History teacher getting carried away by the episode of Shivaji killing Afzul Khan seemed entirely apt.

On the whole, I tried to be faithful to Gogol's spirit. Here's a group of stupid people not even aware (in a strong moral sense) that they are corrupt and greedy. Their actions seem in character, stemming from the mores of the small world they inhabit. I had to think of such a small world. Once I hit on the idea of Surungwad, a small princely state, everything followed naturally. The officials, so used to kowtowing to the ruling family, have now transferred that 'loyalty' to the new rulers in Delhi. The habit of misusing their positions for private gain continues unabated.

Think of those princely states just after Independence. Land was fetching good prices. The landowners were sending their sons to college. I had met types like Sarjerao (Gogol's Hlestakov) in Kolhapur. Each of them had an attendant and a cook. These young men found life at home boring. College was an excuse for merriment and expensive living. I even recall a chap who wrote to his father asking him for 'gabardine' fee, sure of the fact that the old man would never know that gabardine was trousers material. In college, these young men listened to writers speak on literary problems and when they went home, they quoted what they had heard, thus impressing the family and neighbours. In creating Sarjerao I had this whole class of landowners' sons to fall back on and their style of living fitted the bill. (There was an interesting bit of criticism of this character D. K. Bedekar said that Gogol had intended him to be a hobo. Actually that was how he was conceived by Danny Kaye in the film. Bedekar went by the film, without reference to Gogol.)

Surungwad and its atmosphere seemed parallel to the situation described by Gogol. I sought 'to domesticate' Gogol's world. The doctor clearing a government hospital and the maternity ward to house the bridegroom's party during his daughter's marriage is an act so typical of our petty bureaucrats! Whatever took place, it had to have, in Shakespeare's words, 'a local habitation and a name'. Otherwise I would never have been able to communicate what Gogol wanted to convey to the audience and I would have ceased to have a meaningful dialogue with the spectators.

Our earlier adaptations of Shakespeare, *Zunzarrao* (*Othello*) for instance, capture the spirit of the original and the characters come alive. Granted that the poetic essence is sometimes lost. But in a literal translation both may be missed out. Even in the utterance of a name, our own inflexion harmonizes with our own names. Vinda Karandikar's translation of *King Lear* is accurate, excellent. It's a unique achievement. But if we tried to stage it, the words would communicate little. Even for the poetic essence to be transmitted, one has to have recourse to one's own poetic tradition, the associations that words and sounds bring and their rhythm. (In Gadkari's *Rajsanyasa*, for example, the lyricism of *Raya, manata asel te bol, manata nasele te bol*.) Even a concept like a storm has different associations for us and the west.



P. L. Deshpande directing Satish Dubhashi and Bhakti Barve in *Ti Phularani*.

I am fully in favour of straight translations for certain kinds of literature. I translated Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and a Georgian novel *Anything May Happen*. There I took no liberties with the text. I concentrated on a faithful rendering into Marathi of the original, without changing a single name. But when it comes to a play, I feel differently. Then adaptation comes more naturally to me. It might be argued that an adaptation loses somewhat in literary value. But for me it is the only way of making a play stage-worthy. Certain departures from the original become inevitable. For instance, the Mayor's wife is vain and pampered. I made her his second wife, someone much younger and, therefore, able to wheedle anything out of him. It was the only way she could have been acceptable to our audiences.

That is why an adaptation becomes a 'parallel' creation. When an author reads the original, he tells himself, 'How very like what happens here! What Gogol is depicting is so universal!'. But when he begins to adapt, it is not just the original that grips him. Along with the original, there is his own experience of living, his own observation of human beings, institutions, situations. When the original has such experiences as its ally, the adapta-

tion finds roots. It communicates the essence of the original through an experience that can be shared with spectators who, as a result, finds the new work wholly credible. Here is a pack of exceedingly foolish people. The kind one might meet anywhere. They are corrupt and petty. But it's their folly that makes for the humour and the corruption is not of a kind that arouses anger or indignation. One might here recall the fact that Gogol's *Inspector General* was rejected by the censors who regarded it as an indictment of the regime, but Tsar Nicholas I found this comedy so funny that he overruled them. I tried to be faithful to the comic spirit of Gogol's original and that is why audiences found the play so exceedingly enjoyable!

\* \* \*

With *Pygmalion* the problem was of a different order. Its core is language, and the mimic in me was fascinated by this opportunity to play with the nuances, the pronunciation, the stress, the word order in our language. Think of the Marathi spoken in the Shahpur area near Belgaum. Its inflexion is so endearing. The whole point here was not to criticize any of the varieties spoken but to project them, with fun and affection. My instincts guided me to a language with rich pictorial potential. I remember years ago waiting for a service motor at the stand in Shirval. Two farmers were arguing vehemently and then the one who had the last word said, "Now, speak up. So your wheel has got stuck?" Shaw's language has the force of an intellectual argument. I depended for impact on words and their associations, on usage where grammatical rules proved insufficient. For instance, *hota* (was) is regarded as the correct pronunciation and *vhata* as incorrect. But by what logic is the negative *navhata* accepted as correct?

The speech of Dagdoba (Doolittle) offered plenty of scope for several down-to-earth and homely images, with a slightly rural flavour. (*I'm not in the habit of speaking once this way and again that way, like the folds of a dhoti when it is tied round the waist... Does the mango tree alone boast of leaves? Doesn't the castor tree also have leaves? Sure, both have leaves. But have you ever heard of castor leaves decorating entrances?*) Here was an opportunity for assonance, alliteration, rhyme and I used it to the full.

And, of course, there is the end of Act Three, when the creative energy in me ran away with the words. Manjula (Eliza) is still smarting under the humiliations she has received at the hands of Dr. Ashok (Higgins). Alone on the stage, she breaks out in lines directed at him. A little diffident at first, "*The lizard's bounded by a hedge. Can the lapwing swallow up the sea?*" She is over-reaching herself perhaps. But then her fury spills out. "*Wait awhile, your pot of sins is now full. And it's time I taught you a good lesson!*" She fantasizes, imagining herself a queen, and Ashok, the victim, pleading for mercy and receiving a reprieve. The lines are brisk; they are accompanied by swift action. Bhakti Barve (who plays Manjula—Eliza) struts about on the stage and invariably wins the applause of spectators.

In this adaptation I did not merely 'domesticate' the original. I had to up-date it. In *Pygmalion*, during the visit to the house of Higgins' mother, Clara says that she finds Eliza's 'new small talk' delightful. I replaced this



by 'the new language of the angry generation'. It hit the mark: the ambition of fashionable ladies to be 'in' with the latest events, in literature and the arts. (You discuss a play with them, they will not speak of the play or the actors, but of 'lighting effects' though not one of them can tell a 'baby' from a 'spot'.)

Vasant (Freddy in *Pygmalion*) is doing his B.A. with Sanskrit. The type is established at once. The image conjured is *not* that of an erudite scholar but of a single innocuous male student in a class of girls. Once the up-dating process begins you bring in the last cinema show, the jackpot, *matka*, everything. I have seen a Ramlila production where Hanuman walks from shop to shop collecting kerosene for the burning up of Lanka. There are all those jibes against hoarding, black-marketing and the audiences don't think of it as an anachronism but accept it in their stride.

But, on the whole, the mood of the adaptation is implicit in the title. *Ti Phularani*, Balkavi's poem. It's a charming moment. Manjula (Eliza) has learnt to recite the poem. But she insists that when Ashok (Higgins) recites it, the words sound beautiful. She starts reciting the poem. The other two join in. These are moments with a touch of lyricism: the image of the Phularani playing on the carpet of green grass, with a shy glance at the sun in the sky. The fields, the forest, the beasts are soon asleep. A love-strain is heard afar in the sky and there is the gift of a tender kiss on the ground. There is just a hint of a bond between two disparate and distant things, with Dr. Joshi (Pickering) aptly reciting the lines about the evening breeze which has guessed this relationship.

Ever since I read it, the poem has been one of my favourites. I remember that in 1950 I even wrote to B. S. Murdhekar asking him to translate it and send it to Walt Disney. I was enthralled by the delicacy of the tie between the sun and the Phularani. The title came in a flash as the only possible one for a flower-seller and the text of the poem crept in to add a touch of tenderness to the play. A line-by-line analysis of the poem is hardly necessary. It's a matter of total comprehension. The poem echoes the ties being formed, but left unspoken in the play.

I admit I paid little heed to Shaw's long essay at the end of the play. Perhaps, the Fabian in him might have felt a twinge of guilt at the 'romantic' possibilities in the play. I stuck to the text and while adapting it, I experienced the joy of discovering the nuances, the facets, the rhythm of my own language.

Of course, it can be argued that my version lacks the intellectual stature of Shaw's original. I confess that I did not find here traces of that intellectual element so evident in *St. Joan*. There only the first scene is hilarious (about the hens beginning to lay eggs as soon as the Captain agrees to take Joan to the Dauphin). But many of the other scenes contain a good deal of argument. Some of it is based on the concept of nationhood: whether one should be loyal to the feudal lord and the Church or to God, the king and the nation. Joan even refers to God giving us "our countries and language", almost equating the idea of a nation with a common language spoken by its people. Medieval ideas are seen replaced by a new concept of nationhood.

*Pygmalion*, too, makes the point that the way a language is spoken determines the class of the speaker. There is discussion round this point, but it is all in a lighter vein, and very enjoyable. Middle-class morality is ridiculed but without a trace of bitterness, the way our *tamasha* folk satirize the respectable and the educated. And, in the main, language aside, it is centred round a person's desire to be considered not just a guinea pig but a human.

\* \* \*

Adapting Brecht's *Three Penny Opera* posed an altogether different problem. I was attracted by its music, the bite in the satire. There is no 'black' humour in the play. Instead there is exuberance, abandon. Of the many plays of the Berliner Ensemble that I had witnessed, the one that I found really grim was 'Mother Courage'. I was reminded of our women in Marathwada, whose life-business it is to exist. Their only problem—one of survival . . .

Now turning to *Teen Paishacha Tamasha*, my adaptation of Brecht's *Three Penny Opera*. Once music becomes an integral part of a play, it ushers in norms of its own. In this particular case, our traditional music (including *natya sangeet* and *bhavageet*) would have proved inadequate for the content of the play. Jabbar Patel was absolutely right in using pop, jazz, rock. This music supplied the harshness needed to project the satire in the work. But Jenny's songs called for another, very different treatment. I took her to Vasantrao Deshpande. He taught her to acquire the strength and projection of the *tawaifi* voice (which, in the old days, had to carry all the way down the lane). Madhuri Purandare who played the role quickly absorbed Vasantrao's teaching. In the seventh scene, she comes right up to the edge of the stage, looks at the spectators straight in the eye and relates her story. "If some of you ladies cared to visit me, you might find your husbands or fathers in my bed. To be poor is a sin, to be poor is a curse, to be poor is agony. As we sell our bodies, God stands before us in the form of *bhakti*". Spectators are moved by the direct, unsentimental delivery. That kind of presentation, in the sophisticated sphere of music, used to come so naturally to Siddeshwari Devi!

The play is called a *tamasha* but I did not think of it in terms of that particular folk form. I conceived it in the broader sense of a *tamasha* as spectacle or performance. In the text, I came to the point at once. 'One paisa for song (*gan*), the second for dance (*nach*), the third . . . the third as a bribe (*lach*)'.

I tried to bring the experience into the orbit of life in Bombay. The early hours of the morning. The police and the assistant editors on night shifts, the night duty nurses, the actors, the *tamasha* folk (who turn night into day), and, of course, the drama critics, and the gorkha watchman will now lie down to sleep. The women clerks in the milk booths, the newspaper vendors, the municipal sweepers, the temple priests and the announcer of the first *sabha* of AIR will now embark on the day's work. I tried in every possible way to localize and 'domesticate' the play. Janumama (Peachum) makes no bones about the achievements of his Training Centre for Beggars.

"Other educational institutes lure innocent youngsters with prospects of employment. We frankly declare that we teach our students how to beg and thus ensure them a living wage". The announcement of Malan (Polly), in her capacity as Chairman of the Mutual Benefit Bank, that the days (and especially the nights) of petty thefts are over, that for thieves it is sounder policy now not to break open safes and raid banks; they should start and control banks themselves. She continues, "The feudal mode of individual action must now make way for joint ventures in consonance with a democratic era". The henchmen of Ankush (Macheath) sitting in a Board meeting in their new role as 'respectable' social figures are easy to recognize. The spectators immediately identify them with the directors of 'co-operative' banks, known for embezzlement and fraud.

The barbs against hypocrisy, the edge of social criticism are retained, as in the first two adaptations, but re-inforced by vibrant music which laces the instructive element in the play with fun and merriment.

[The article is based on an informal discussion with Dr. Kumud Mehta.—Editor]

## Ramlila: Tradition and Styles

Induja Awasthi

कुरु रामकथां पुण्यां श्लोकबद्धां मनोरमाम् ।  
यावत् स्थास्यन्ति गिरयः सरितश्च महीतले ॥  
तावद् रामायणकथा लोकेषु प्रचरिष्यति ।  
यावद् रामस्य च कथा त्वत्कृतां प्रचरिष्यति ॥

(Valmiki Ramayana 1.2.36-37)

(Thus Brahma spoke to Valmiki, "O Sage, compose the story of Rama in the beautiful *shloka* metre and I assure you that as long as the great mountains stand steadfast and the deep rivers flow on this holy land, your *Ramayana* will be cherished by the people. The Rama story sung by you will be immortal".)

Brahma's boon has come true. Through the ages the *Ramayana* has permeated the very core of the Indian mind. We have several Sanskrit plays and narrative poems which tell and retell the story of Rama. Temples in all corners of the country present Rama episodes: they are painted and carved on their walls. The Rama story becomes a motif in the folk, miniature and modern painting styles and is the subject of innumerable folk songs, folk dances and ballads. From the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, after the emergence of the Bhakti cult and the acceptance of Rama as a divine incarnation, *Ramayana*-s were composed in almost all the regional languages of India and Rama was deified as an incarnation of Vishnu. Hindi was blessed by the advent of the great Rama devotee and poet-thinker Tulsidas, who, in his epic poem *Ramcharitmanas*, enriched the Rama story and Ramabhakti. Brahma's boon bore fruit for all time to come.

*Ramcharitmanas* occupies a unique place in the poetic works on the Rama saga. It follows the Vaishnava and Pauranic tradition of handling the story of Rama as a basis for Bhakti. It is at the same time a sensitive, poetic work on the Rama theme. That is why it is the most respected work both in the Bhakti and literary tradition, and has influenced the social conduct, the values and the ideals of the people of North India. There is another dimension which gives it power and popularity: its integral link with the Ramlila, that ancient and most widely spread form of India's traditional theatre.

The story of Rama has been the subject of Sanskrit as well as language plays, but there is a basic difference between the literary Ramaplays and Ramlila. The objective of the Ramlila is to propagate Ramabhakti. Structurally, it does not consist of dialogues alone as in the Rama-plays, but is totally based on the recitation of the epic *Ramcharitmanas*. The Ramlila is thus a vernacular edition of the age-old performing tradition of the

*Ramayana*. The *Ramcharitmanas* of Tulsidas soon became part of this performing tradition owing to its popular appeal, and its epic design, conceived dramatically.

#### Origins

Mention of the dramatic presentation of the Rama theme based on Valmiki's *Ramayana* occurs for the first time in the *Harivamsha Purana* which is believed to have been compiled in the fourth century A.D.

ततः स ननृते तत्र वरदत्तो नटस्तथा ।  
स्वपुरे पुरवासीनां परं हर्षं समादधत् ॥  
रामायणं महाकाव्यं उद्देश्यं नाटकीकृतम् ।  
जन्म विष्णोरमेयस्य राक्षसेन्द्रवधेऽस्य ॥

(*Harivamsha* II.43)

(Then the actor called Varadatta danced and gratified the people of Vajrapur. He presented a performance based on the *Ramayana*, depicting how Lord Vishnu incarnated himself to kill the Rakshasa King.)

This reference from the *Harivamsha* is important as it indicates that the performance was not a classical Sanskrit Rama-play, but a dramatic presentation based on the *Ramayana* of Valmiki.

After this, there is no reference to this type of epic-based performance for several centuries. Much later than the bulk of great Sanskrit plays, it is *Mahanataka* or *Hanumannataka* which is of special interest. Its unique form suggests the continuity of the traditional *Ramayana* theatre. It was believed to be the oldest among the Sanskrit plays by some scholars of Sanskrit drama, but that theory has now been refuted. The critic Sharada Tanaya in his *Bhava Prakashana* has placed *Mahanataka* in a special category, calling it a *Samagra* play and has defined a *Samagra* play thus:

नाटकं नृत्तवाराख्यं तत्समग्रं इतीरितम् ॥

The *Samagra* play is a play which is embellished with music and dance. *Mahanataka* violates some of the conventions of Sanskrit drama: it does not have Prakrit dialogues for the minor characters, and there is no Vidushaka, but the most significant difference is that its textual material is a compendium of verses taken from many sources: *Valmiki Ramayana*, *Adhyatma Ramayana*, the classical Sanskrit Rama-plays, from *Uttar Ramacharita* to *Anargharaghava*, and the well-known *Rama Kavya*-s, *Reghuvamsha*, *Janaki Haran* and *Bhatti Kavya*. On the basis of these characteristics of *Mahanataka*, we may presume that it is an early composition of the traditional *Ramayana* theatre.

In Hindi, the first examples of Rama plays which seem to belong to a living and popular theatre tradition are also named *Hanumannataka* and *Ramayana Mahanataka*. These plays written in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century follow the model of the Sanskrit *Mahanataka*. It seems

that by this time the name *Hanumannataka* or *Mahanataka* had become a generic name for the traditional *Ramayana* theatre. This is also indicated in *Gautam Chandrika* which refers to Tulsī's life and achievements. The writer Krishna Dutt Misra claims to be a disciple of Tulsidas and presents his descriptions as those of an eye-witness. According to the *Gautam Chandrika*, the idea of starting Ramlila entered Tulsī's mind while he was reading the *Valmiki Ramayana*. The incident has been narrated thus:

श्रवन किये षट्काण्ड सुहावन । वाल्मीकि रामायण पावन ॥  
चितत भरतभारतीनिरनय । मन दृग देखत हनुमत अभिनय ॥  
पूजि कबीस कपीस पुजारी । रामराजलीला विस्तारी ॥

(Tulsī heard the recitation of the chapters of Valmiki's *Ramayana*, pondered over Bharata's dictates, and tried to recreate *Hanumat-Abhinaya* in his mind's eye. The next day, after worshipping the monkey-god and doing obeisance to the great poet Valmiki, he arranged the presentation of the episode of Rama's coronation.)

Whether we accept this description in the *Gautam Chandrika* about Tulsī's starting the Ramlila or not, the reference to a *Ramayana* performance as *Hanumat Abhinaya* is significant. It suggests that the Sanskrit *Mahanataka* was an early composition, used in traditional Rama performance and that is why similar compositions of a later period were also given the name *Mahanataka* or *Hanumannataka*.

By this time the Rama story had become very popular in its theatrical presentation in various forms of traditional theatre all over India. Ankiya Nat of Assam, Kathakali of Kerala, Yakshagana of Karnataka, and Dashavatar of Maharashtra, all have Rama plays in their repertoire. Kathakali is said to have evolved out of *Ramanattam* which was a serialized presentation of eight *Ramayana* episodes (from the birth of Rama to his coronation). *Rama Vijaya* in Ankiya Nat is one of the form's most popular presentations. In the Dashavatar of Maharashtra, the Rama episodes were presented serially and became very popular. The Bhavai of Gujarat also had Ramlila *Vesha*-s (episodes) which used to be performed along with their usual secular *vesha*-s. Yakshagana also had various Rama *prasanga*-s which won appreciation and were performed serially. Almost all the forms of puppet theatre present the *Ramayana* stories.

These forms evolved independently, utilizing elements from the indigenous theatre. They seem to have artistic links with Ramlila, and follow a similar structural pattern. In this context it is noteworthy that in the Hindi region, the *Ramayana* theatre is based on the *Ramcharitmanas*. Similarly in the other regions, the various language *Ramayana*-s became the basis for their *Ramayana* theatre (both human or puppet) and supplied episodes and textual material.\*

In the Hindi region we have the first reference to *Ramayana* enactment in *Sandesha Resak*, an Apabhramsha work written in the thirteenth

century by the poet Addahman. Describing Multan, the venue of the poem, a traveller says:

कहव ठाई, प्रसीसिय चाईहि दयवरहि ।  
रामायणु ग्रहिणवियइ कत्यहि कयवरहि ॥

(*Sandesha Rasak* II.44)

(At some places, Brahmins, who have renounced the world, bless the people and in others the Kavyvarih (the great poets) are enacting the *Ramayana*.)

In the *Asa di Var* of Guru Nanak, mention is made of a dance-drama pertaining to the Rama theme. Referring to certain dramatic performances, Nanak says that to earn a livelihood the people of Vrindavana sing and dance as Krishna and Gopis as well as Sita and Rama:

रोटियां कारन पूरें ताल, आप पिछारें घरती नाल,  
गावन गोपियां गावन कान, गावन सीता राजे राम,

(*Asa di Var Mahala* 1)

The statement of Kagabhushundi, in the *Uttara Kanda* (the last chapter of *Ramcharitmanas*), shows that Tulsidas was familiar with *Ramayana* performance which later on he chose to propagate and expand. Kagbhushundi says:

खेळैं तहूँ बालकन्ह मील । करउँ सकल रघुनायक लील ॥ २ ॥

(*Ramcharitmanas, Uttara Kanda, 109,4,2*)

(I used to play there with the children and enact the *lila* of Rama, the great among the Raghuvanshis.)

It is evident that Tulsidas recognized the popularity and power of this type of *Ramayana* performance prevalent at this time, called it *Ramlila* and gave it a powerful literary base in the form of his great epic *Ramcharitmanas*.

A study of the structure of the *Ramcharitmanas* reveals such a sound dramatic design that it seems to have been written to be performed. Each episode has been conceived as a single dramatic unit, following the pattern of the traditional theatre. The narrative and dramatic portions are properly balanced, fulfilling appropriate dramatic requirements. The narrative portions introduce the story, describe the locale and the characters involved in that particular episode and the dialogue part can easily be assigned to the characters. One might refer to episodes like the first meeting, *Swayamvara* and marriage, the Kaikeyi-Manthara dialogue, the departure for the forest, the Shoorpanakha event, the abduction of Sita, Ashokavatika, and finally the battle between Rama and Ravana. They are so dramatic that even their recitation is like a theatrical experience. This dramatic design of the structure makes it possible for the episodes from the *Ramcharitmanas* to be lifted and presented on the *Ramlila* stage without much change.

*Ramlila* has now become an important part of our traditional theatre. Due to its popularity and pervasiveness, it occupies an important place among the people. It will be correct to say that *Ramlila* is the only theatre form which symbolizes the religious, cultural and artistic expression of the mass of people. This theatre is not merely a stage presentation; it is one of our major cultural festivals. It would, in fact, be quite impossible to meet anyone in North India who is not familiar with *Ramlila*.

*Ramlila* is one of the most widely spread forms of our traditional theatre, being the major dramatic form of all the Hindi-speaking states (Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan) and it is also presented in certain cities of Punjab, Gujarat, Maharashtra and in the hill regions. In the Terai area of Nepal, the *Ramlila* has a strong tradition. Apart from performances by the local people, it is also presented by *Ramlila troupes* from India. In Orissa, *Ramlila* is presented in the form of a fascinating dance-drama. It can, therefore, be stated that *Ramlila* performances extend to Kumaon and Nepal in the north, Punjab in the west, Orissa in the east and Maharashtra in the south.

It is only natural that a drama form so widely staged should have its regional variations. What surprises one is the measure of uniformity in this diversity. Whether it is the *Ramlila* stage in Janakpur Dham (a town near the

Coronation: Assi Ramlila





Bihar-Nepal border) or the Assi Ramlila in Varanasi (supposed to be started by Tulsidas) or the Ramanagar Lila or the Ramlila of Satna in Madhya Pradesh or the Ramlila of Pataunda in Rajasthan, the story, characterization and, consequently, the impact and atmosphere remain the same. There are shared elements in the style of presentation. These include presentation in the form of cycle plays; uniformity in the portrayal of specific situations; a sincerity and sense of identification of the performers and audience; the significance of ceremonials and rituals in the performance; and, most important of all, the recitation of the *Ramcharitmanas* as the basis of the performance.

The recitation of *Ramcharitmanas* is an integral part of all types of Ramililas; the performance is conceived along with the recitation, which has a religious significance. A group of singers called the Ramayanis are attached to the performance and they recite the entire text, sequence by sequence, pausing at various points to give scope to the actors to present the same sequence in dialogues, which are quite often a paraphrase of the verses of the *Ramcharitmanas*. Thus the structure of the Ramlila performance is determined by the recitation of *Ramcharitmanas*. Indeed it appears that Ramlila was conceived as a commentary on the work.

In Ramnagar (near Varanasi) the object of Ramlila is described thus:

पहिलो तिलक रामलीलावर । जिहि लखि परति न तिमिर कूप नर ॥  
जाको जहाँ ग्रहं है जैसो । लीला ललित लखावहि तैसो ॥

(The great Ramlila is the primary commentary, and seeing it helps man to avoid a fall in the dark chambers of hell; all the concepts and utterances of the *Ramcharitmanas* are elaborated and become clear in the Ramlila.)

While the recitation is on, the actors stand on the stage in a frozen position. Our modern audience with its weakness for dramatic illusion—an offshoot of the western dramatic tradition—may complain that the sudden interruption of action and dialogues by recitation can hamper the dramatic flow. But in all our traditional drama, greater attention is paid to the atmosphere of the play and its poetic aspects rather than to dramatic interplay. In religious plays the atmosphere becomes all the more important. The ordinary spectators, who delight in witnessing the *lila*, find nothing lacking in the style of presentation. They are fully acquainted with not only the story but even its dialogues in the minutest detail. That is why the intervening recitation does not in any way mar their appreciation. Rather, this kind of break affords them an opportunity to retain the emotional state a little longer. It also fulfils the real object of Ramlila: giving the audience a sense of fulfilment and an identification with the divine characters.

The most prominent characteristic of Ramlila is its presentation for many days in succession. The story, from the birth of Rama to his coronation, is divided into various dramatic episodes and one or more episodes are enacted on one day, depending on the time-limit of the particular Ramlila. Ramlila is staged for 10 or 11 days at one place, 15 days at another, 21 days at the third, and there are places where it continues even



Rama's marriage: Ayodhya Ramlila

for a month. But nowhere is the Rama story enacted in a single day. This practice of presenting the story as a cycle play holds the audience in one mood for several days and makes the dramatic production more effective. Continuous contact with the audience endears the *Svaroopas* (the images of god, as the characters are called by the audience) to them. Ramlila is staged at many places around the Dashera festival in the month of Ashwin. The situations in the story are so presented on different days that the war between Rama and Ravana and the ultimate slaying of the latter can be shown on the day of Dashera, the tenth day of Ashwin. In some regions, however, Ramlila is staged around Ramanavami. For example, in Pataunda and the adjoining villages in Rajasthan and in some parts of Malwa and in Orissa. According to tradition, Tulsidas had Ramlila performed in Ayodhya on the eve of Ramanavami and in Varanasi on the eve of Dashera. The practice in Ayodhya has now been abandoned, and the main celebrations of Ramlila take place on the eve of Dashera. Ramlila in Bharatpur (Rajasthan) and Chetganj Mohalla in Varanasi is performed between Dashera and Diwali and the coronation of Rama is shown a day prior to Diwali. Thus the dates of the performances of Ramlila vary from region to region. But in every region the dates fixed traditionally are adhered to every year.

This theatrical form, based on recitation, was primarily evolved to propagate Ramabhakti. The word *lila* itself means the actions of the incarnation and it has a theological significance, Ramlila has, therefore, been conceived as a religious ritual and to act in it or even to witness a performance is regarded as an expression of devotion to Rama. It is a religious act. Besides, the entire performance is full of rituals and ceremonies. Before the Ramlila performance begins, the crowns of Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, Shatrughna and Sita are worshipped and consecrated on an auspicious day. The *Swaroopa*-s are conceived as images of gods and endowed with divine qualities once they wear the crowns. Every day at the beginning and the end of the performance the *Swaroopa*-s are worshipped and the *arati* is performed with great pomp and show. The last episode—the coronation of Rama—is celebrated with songs and dances. In Ayodhya, Rama's birthplace, there is music and dance all through the night. In Ramanagar, the whole town flocks for a *darshan* of the *Panchayatan Jhanki*, the grand tableau of the five epic characters in the coronation scene.

The stage used for Ramlila is its most interesting element. It has evolved forms and structures which retain many elements and conventions of medieval staging practice. The two basic values of the medieval theatre, namely multiplicity of locale and simultaneity of action, determine the nature of the Ramlila stage and its staging conditions in different regions and various styles.

An interesting feature of the Ramlila 'stage' can be observed in Varanasi, where various episodes are enacted in different locales, suited to the setting of that particular sequence. It is believed that this practice was started by Tulsidas himself, and he used this device to involve people from all parts of the city in the performance. The Maharaja of Ramanagar went a step ahead and built palaces, gardens and ponds in Ramanagar to depict the various locales of the story as described in the *Ramcharitmanas*. Thus the whole town is used as a theatre with permanently built locales such as Dasharatha's palace, Janaka's palace and his garden, Chitrakuta, Panchavati, Ravana's palace and the Ashoka garden, where Sita is kept in captivity. In Mathura, they follow another interesting practice. During the day Ramlila is presented as an open-air pantomimic show in a large field and at night the same episode is performed on a platform-stage. The need to preserve the continuity of action, essential for its epic character, led to the convention of multiple setting, which is now followed even in the Ramlilas of the professional troupes and in modern experiments in the dance-drama style.

Rama has been conceived as an ideal human being ever since the time of Valmiki. But Tulsidas lent to the story of Rama and his character a glory which is manifest in each and every production of Ramlila. The atmosphere of the entire performance remains sacred and orderly as becomes a devotional assembly. The witnessing of Ramlila by the spectators also signifies the same kind of devotion and faith attached to the *darshan* of the deities in temples.

Ramlila receives maximum identification from the spectators. It is a collective effort and the people of the village or the locality where it is staged feel fully involved. In several situations, there is no gap between the



Rama worshipping Shiva: Ramanagar Ramlila

actors and the spectators and the emotional partnership of the audience is ensured in the dramatic experience. When Rama arrives for the wedding, all the dwellers of the region of the Ramilla welcome the bridegroom, almost as if they are all the subjects of Raja Janaka. At the time of Rama's banishment, the weeping multitude representing the dwellers of Ayodhya, follow Rama, Lakshmana and Sita to the forest. During the episode of Rama's coronation the spectators imagine that they are the subjects of an ideal Ram Rajya and rejoice at his coronation. This may be because the Rama-story has

Site: Ramnagar Ramilla



been so splendidly conceived or due to the reputation enjoyed by *Ram-charitmanas*, but this degree of involvement by the spectators can hardly be found in any other theatre form. This fact alone lends a different dimension to Ramilla.

The actors participating in Ramilla are amateurs, who receive no fees for their performance. The offerings made during the *arati* of Ramilla are distributed among them. Sometimes they are given just a part of the amount. Sometimes the whole amount is given to them. Most of the artistes take great pride in playing a role in Ramilla and each of them tries to live the role. Money itself has little attraction for them. In many Ramillas the key roles are played by persons from a particular family and this continues from generation to generation. Those who earn their livelihood in other cities return to their home-towns almost as if they were there to participate in a family celebration.

There are specific rules regarding the selection of 'actors' and these are followed in all Ramillas. For example, all the roles, whether male or female, are played by men. The roles of Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, Shatrughna and Sita are enacted by Brahmin boys between the age of twelve and sixteen. They are required to be attractive and well-built to suit the images of divine characters. During the days of Ramilla, these boys, called *Swaroops*, are required to conduct themselves in a virtuous manner and receive respect and reverence from all.

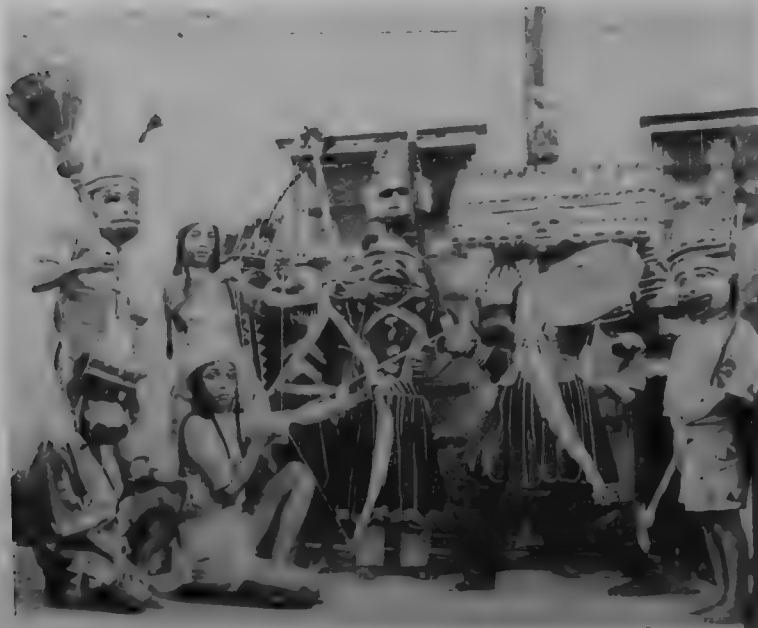
Ramilla performances are organized on an amateur basis, except for the Ramillas presented by professional Ramilla troupes. There are Ramilla Committees to look after the management of the Ramilla performances and the members are selected jointly by those interested in the production of Ramilla. The Committee raises donations for the Ramilla performance. In most places there is one Ramilla Committee for one Ramilla. In the big towns, however, there are several Ramilla Committees and as many Ramillas. The Ramilla Committees take great pride in discharging their duties and all the members work actively to make the show a success. This is how Ramilla is organized, year after year, without any adequate funds or aid from the Government.

There are four main styles of the traditional Ramillas. Despite the variety in style, some of the episodes are presented in the same manner in every style. For instance, the birth and coronation of Rama are always presented in the form of tableaux. On the day of Ravana's killing, huge paper-effigies of Ravana and his brother Kumbhakarna are erected. Rama and Lakshmana appear on the stage seated in a chariot-like van, they engage in 'battle' for a while with Ravana and shoot burning wooden arrows which set the effigies on fire. This announces the victory of good over evil and is accompanied by flames and bursting crackers. This *lila*, presented on the day of Dashera, forms the chief attraction of every Ramilla; to most people Ramilla means this festival of Dashera. On the day of Rama's wedding and Bharata's union with Rama, there are processions with music bands, decorated *chaukis* and beautiful tableaux. As they wend their way through the towns and villages they are met with joyous acclaim and stopped at different places where offerings are made to them.

The importance and popularity of the tableaux and pageants in Ramililas and the inclusion of the recitation of *Ramcharitmanas* lead one to conclude that the style of pantomime was perhaps the initial form of Ramlila. Besides, whatever historical evidence is available with regard to traditional Ramililas suggests that the *lila*-s in their initial period were pantomimic, and that the addition of dramatic dialogues was a later development. The Chitrakut Ramlila of Varanasi, which is said to be the oldest (Adi) Ramlila, is pantomimic even to this day. In Mathura, where both the styles prevail, it is believed that the pantomime-based style is the earlier one. Thus there are two major traditional styles of Ramlila presentation; one with tableaux and pageants (pantomimic) and the other, dialogue-based (dramatic). In the former the dialogues, if any, are very brief. In the enactment of some of the situations, the *Swaroop*-s and other characters are seated on decorated chariots and carried in processions, while Ramayanis sit reciting the *Ramcharitmanas* in the other chariot. The Chitrakut Ramlila of Varanasi and the arena Ramlila of Mathura are good examples of this style.

The second style of production of Ramlila is dialogue-based. Situations of the story are converted into dialogues, and a script is prepared for each situation, giving it a dramatic form. Dialogues are borrowed from other

*Rama-Ravana battle: Bisau (Rajasthan) Ramlila*



*King Janaka and a courtier. Mathura Ramlila*

Rama literature; popular lyrics and folk songs are incorporated, and where necessary even new characters are introduced. Among the traditional Ramililas perhaps it was the Ramanagar Ramlila where such an extensive dramatic script was prepared for the first time. But now this practice has been adopted at most places. Even so, the most important Ramlila of this style is the Ramlila at Ramanagar. The Ramlila at Assi (Varanasi) believed to be propagated by Tulsidas is also dialogue-based.

The third style, namely the operatic style of Ramlila, gained currency only a century ago. In the operatic style of Ramlila, the text of *Ramcharitmanas* is set to classical *raga*-s, and the dialogues are also sung in classical *raga*-s. The Ramlila at Almora and of the village Patunda in Rajasthan are good examples of this style.

The fourth style of Ramlila, presented by the professional Ramlila troupes, is becoming increasingly popular. There are many Ramlila troupes in Mathura, Ayodhya and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh and in Darbhanga in Bihar. These troupes visit towns and villages and present Ramililas. The troupes are professionally organized. There is a manager who can be said to be the director-producer of that Ramlila. He looks after the make-up and costumes. Besides, a harmonium and a table player are permanent fixtures. The *Swaroop*-s and other actors keep changing. Each troupe has about twenty members, and they depend for their livelihood on Ramlila shows. It is evident from the theatre style of the professional Ramlila that it is influenced by the tradition of the Parsi Theatre, the successful professional



theatre of India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Bearing in mind the taste of Hindu theatre-goers, the Parsi theatre had incorporated certain popular traits of the *Lila* plays such as *Jhanki-s* (tableaux) and recitation. The first Ramlila troupes, which were founded about this time, preserved the religious and ritualistic nature of the traditional Ramlila and also used the theatrical conventions of the Parsi theatre. Hence, these Ramlilas, which incorporated both these conventions, became very popular.

During the last thirty years performances in various forms of ballets, dance-dramas or shadow-plays, based on the Rama story, have been created and have usually been described as Ramlila. The Ramlila of Uday Shankar was presented as a shadow play, that of the Little Ballet Troupe in puppet movements. The Ramlila Ballet of the Bharatiya Kala Kendra also features among these new experiments. In all these creations the bulk of the textual material has again been drawn from the *Ramcharitmanas*, and the costumes, music, stage-conventions are similar to those of the traditional Ramlila.

Studying the vast tradition of the Ramlila, one realizes that a very large part of our cultural heritage is contained in this theatre form. It is through this performing tradition of the *Ramcharitmanas* that the ideals and values of the epic become part of the social and ethical life of the Indian people. The Rama story is part of the traditional theatre of the whole country; it is charged with the deep devotion, the poetic beauty and the dramatic power of the *Ramcharitmanas*. Thus Ramlila has now become one of the most popular among the traditional *Ramayana* presentations of India.

\* \* \*

• We find that Tulsidas and his *Ramcharitmanas* are greatly respected in various other languages. In Orissa the *Ramcharitmanas* was read and recited for centuries, and has inspired and influenced the Oriya *Ramayana* theatre, also called Ramlila. In Gujarat and Punjab, recitations of the *Ramcharitmanas* are quite popular. It is interesting to note that in *Ramkatha* Dodatta of the traditional theatre form of Karnataka, Tulsidas is referred to with great respect as Kavi Maharaj—the king of poets. In the prologue the Sutradhara remarks that the *Ramkatha* is based on the *Ramayana* of Tulsidas because Tulsidas, being an incarnation of Shiva, has written the best *Ramayana*. Later Shiva, Parvati and Narada quote couplets from *Ramcharitmanas* while discussing the oneness of Shiva and Vishnu Bhakti.

सिवद्रोही मम भगत कहावा । सो नर सपनेहुँ मोहि न भावा ॥

(*Ramcharitmanas*, Lanka Kanda)

(Rama says, "I cannot accept any devotee, even in a dream, who professes devotion to me and is disrespectful to Shiva".)

In the course of the performance, other couplets are also recited. The words from the *Ramcharitmanas* are included to emphasize the greatness of the work and the contribution of Tulsidas towards removing the enmity between the Shaivites and Vaishnavas.

# 80

1898/1978



## BERTOLT BRECHT

Samik Bandyopadhyay

'Truth is concrete', a quotation from Hegel, was chosen as the slogan for *Bertolt Brecht 80*, the comprehensive celebration organized in Calcutta last September by the Max Mueller Bhavan, Calcutta and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. The co-ordinators inducted into the project and the Max Mueller Bhavan team said in a note they prepared on the occasion, 'Indian productions of Brecht's plays have sometimes exposed merely the limitations or idiosyncrasies of the producers themselves. But in most cases, producers have tried to remove the barriers of language and setting and make Brecht more accessible and relevant to an Indian audience. Their attempts have provoked questions as to whether the changes were unavoidable.' The programme as a whole sought to accumulate a massive collection of materials that could equip theatre audiences and theatre workers alike with the background to answer these questions themselves.

The celebration had a quiet beginning with a series of four lectures by Dr. Alokaranjan Dasgupta of the Heidelberg University on the poetry, working diaries, and songs of Brecht, and an overview of changing interpretations of Brecht in international theatre, especially in Italy, the Soviet Union, England, the Scandinavian countries and Portugal. Dr. Dasgupta identified three different phases in Brecht's poetry—the phase of *Die Hauspostille* in which Brecht substitutes the *Gebrauchsllyrik*, the lyric that is useful to man, for the *Gedankenlyrik*, the pure emotional lyric associated with Schiller, Goethe, Hoelderlin, George and Rilke, and exposes the world of bourgeois values and does not spare himself in the process; the second phase of poems written in exile, in which he forges a new colloquial rhythm to draw in the continuous world view of the epic into the more fragmented lyricism of his earlier poetry and discovers the value of the *gestus* as it connected the poetry to be read to the poetry to be heard; and the third phase of the post-war *Buckower Elegien* and *Die Kriegsfibel*, where every line closes on a sudden pause, and a stressed beginning to every line builds journalism into poetry.

Speaking about Brecht's songs, with recordings of several sung by Gisella May, Ekkehard Schall and Brecht himself, Dr. Dasgupta traced Brecht's musical sources in the ideal of the wandering minstrels of the late seventeenth century and musical forms of the jazz. He described Brecht's earliest songs as melancholy in the pre-Raphaelite manner of the early poems of Jibanananda Das, the Bengali poet, and underlined the cultivated roughness of the Mackie Messer song, ominously powerful in Brecht's own singing. He played the two versions of the song of 'The Woman and the Soldier' to illustrate what Brecht came to demand of the song, the fever heat that the first Dessau version lacks and the Eisler version so clearly has.

In his third lecture, Dr. Dasgupta gave extensive readings from his translations of Brecht's working diaries and played excerpts from recorded interviews in which Mrs. Feuchtwanger, Fritz Lang, Herbert Marcuse and others spoke of Brecht. Entries in his working diaries showed how Brecht used his long exile as a creative challenge, with the United States alone leaving him cold. Lang's tribute to Brecht was an acknowledgement of the integrity of Brecht. 'Brecht had refused to commercialize himself', said Lang. Dr. Dasgupta's fourth lecture on the dialectics of Brecht-rezeption in different countries led on directly to Dr. Guenther Erken's talk at the formal inauguration and the two seminars that followed.

Dr. Erken, a German theatre scholar from Cologne, began his talk at the inaugural with an account of the interaction between the theatre and several works by Brecht that are 'works in progress' or material for the stage rather than finished works, and the continuous 'research' that leads to the foundation of a new Brecht text. Of the new Brecht texts found in this manner Dr. Erken referred in particular to *The Fall of the Egoist Fetzer* presented by the Berlin Schaubuhne in 1976 and the unfinished but apparently performable play of circa 1936 called *The Real Life of Jacob Geherda*. Reporting on the present West German response to Brecht, he said, 'The early Brecht was rediscovered in the last decade and it is this part of Brecht's work which lives more than all on the West German stage. . . The younger Brecht

raises the interest of our most prominent directors much more than the classical Brecht.' Dr. Erken's later talks at the inauguration of the exhibition on Brecht's life and works and in the series of lectures that followed dealt in detail with stage design in the German theatre, with special reference to Brecht's designers, music in Brecht's theatre, with special treatments of Weill, Dessau, and Eisler, and Brecht in the West German theatre.

In a paper presented at the seminar on 'Brecht: Theory and Practice' Dharani Ghosh traced the first use of the term 'alienation' to an essay on the Chinese actor Mei Lan Fang. 'Estrangement', he said, 'as Brecht practised it, is an antidote to Alienation in the Feuerbachian sense' Speaking of the relationship between Stanislavski's theories and Brecht's, Ghosh said, 'His differences with Stanislavski were more apparent than real. While Stanislavski was more concerned with training actors, Brecht was concerned with the end-product. I hate to say it, but Brecht's attack on Stanislavski was rooted in ignorance.'

Dr. Erken, in his presentation at the seminar, said that Brecht has achieved a statistical success in Germany, but has lost his provocative

*The section on The Caucasian Chalk Circle in the exhibition, with stills, stage design and set model*



strength. He quoted playwright Max Frisch, who made the 'malicious' statement, 'Brecht has the powerful ineffectiveness of a classic.' But Dr. Erken admitted that Brecht's influence 'has brought to the German stage a large element of professional skill, a new subjectivism in acting and directing. Brecht should be inherited not as a style, but as a method.' Dr. Erken gave an account of stage histories of the major Brecht plays in West Germany and referred to the revived interest in the so-called 'didactic plays'. *The Mother*, produced by a touring theatre, with Therese Giehse in the main role, served to give a middle class audience an awareness of the working class and helped identification with the cause of the working class. In 1971, the didactic plays were rediscovered at the universities. Benno Besson repeated his workshop with workers in Italy in 1975, in the German Democratic Republic in 1976, to 'stimulate the political thinking of the actors.' In the discussion that followed Kirti Jain took up Dr. Erken's last point and said, 'The didactic plays can also help younger audiences to develop and follow Brecht's methods of thinking.' But Dr. Erken objected, 'These plays are too much theory, and too little art, and too overt anyway.' Intervening in my capacity as moderator at this stage, I said, 'Whenever we have approached a Brecht classic in our theatre, we have tended to artify it more; we have emphasized the art and managed to take it away from reality. The didactic plays can mean more to us, to start with. To return to the classics after a grounding in the didactic plays may give our directors a more political approach to Brecht. The other alternative is to divest a play like *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* of much of its 'art' and bring it closer to the spirit of the didactic plays, as Badal Sircar has done.' Ghosh objected, 'Brecht has no fixed political opinion. He always changes.' I countered, 'He never gave up his ironic view of reality. He never shifted from his basic economic understanding of reality. The basic reality of the modern world remains constant with Brecht.' Ghosh argued, 'The didactic plays have a superficial resemblance to platform theatre or the political plays as we have known them in India. Therefore it is very dangerous to stage the didactic plays here. They may easily become excuses for red lighting and slogans.'

Answering a question raised by Kirti Jain, Ghosh said, 'There is no Brechtian style of acting. All that Brecht demands of the actor is a certain kind of distance and analysis. But Stanislavski too had demanded a discovery of generosity in the miser in Molière's *Tartuffe*.' Kirti Jain asked, 'Is it possible to create a distance through the acting? The actress playing *Mother Courage* has to live the character. It's only what she's saying and the conventions that keep the audience out of total involvement.' Ghosh clarified his point, 'Brecht never gives psychological motivation. The distancing comes from Weigel acting like an animal, in her denial of the human element. She becomes a hyena and a woman at the same time.' While Kirti Jain insisted, 'Still *Mother Courage* ends up as a mother.' I said, 'What's so specially Brechtian about the animality? Animality has always or all too often been a part of the tragic heroic experience. The animal projection of a Richard III, a Macbeth or even of a Hamlet has been part of the tragic experience.' Ghosh detected something specially Brechtian in the quality of Helene Weigel's voice: 'When it sings it gives the songs a recitative quality, exposing contradictions in the way it sings.'

Ajitesh Banerjee was the first speaker at the second seminar on "Brecht and Theatre in India". He recounted his desperate and mostly futile efforts in the early sixties to get to know more about Brecht and his theatre: 'Half-educated people told us that there was no scenery in Brecht, that the acting was stylized, the same gestures were repeated continuously, the same music was used throughout.' He saw the film *Mother Courage*, and it proved how wrong they were. 'Production stills and Brecht's writings cleared up things a little. But Satyajit Ray, who acted out a scene from *Arturo Ui* which he had seen abroad, and Utpal Dutt, who acted out the same scene even better, were more helpful.' When he came to produce *The Threepenny Opera* in Bengali in 1969, he tried hard to bring it close to a Bengali experience. 'Adaptation', Banerjee said, 'is possible only when one knows one's own country. I would like to know Brecht through my own tradition. I am not interested in a German presentation of Brecht.' As an example of his Indianization of Brecht, he referred to his transformation of the horsed messenger in *The Threepenny Opera* into part a bare-bodied ash-smeared Shiva, with the ubiquitous tigerskin, and part a policeman vintage British India 1876.

Vijaya Mehta described her work with Brecht's plays as 'an experience with enlightenment for the educated mind.' She had to go abroad to rediscover herself and redefine her work. On her return to the country she took a new look at the traditional folk forms, rediscovering the lost potency of these forms. She tried to use these forms in her treatment of *The Good Person of Setzuan*. The waterseller became a *chaiwalla*, the airman a man who wanted a rickshaw of his own; there was the Dashavatara with the half curtain. But it was 'too self-conscious an effort'. When Fritz Benewitz saw her work, he was thoroughly dissatisfied with his work at the National School of Drama on *The Threepenny Opera*, 'a German presentation which had nothing to do with the Indian theatre'. Working with Benewitz proved to be an exercise in dialectics. 'Our objectives were specifically defined. Khanolkar, who was chosen to adapt the play could not read a word of English. I had to be ten times sure of the implications before I could interpret a piece of the text to Khanolkar in Marathi. Then I had to interpret Khanolkar's imagery to Benewitz.' Fifty per cent of Vijaya Mehta's actors came from the folk theatre and were naturally intuitive and improvisational. She told Benewitz, 'I shall have no sets, no masks. My actors are masks. The sophisticated effort that goes into Schall's acting comes naturally to my folk actors.' But she added regretfully, 'My effort to penetrate into the interior with *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* failed. When the villagers saw the Dashavatara which I had chosen as the essence, I felt I had somehow spoilt the magic that these folk forms have for them. They were more ready to accept my urban theatre.'

Sekhar Chatterjee found the value of Brecht in his 'concern for the exploited': 'For me it was the content that mattered most. The idea of alienation did not fascinate me. May be we need something else in India.' Chatterjee said that Brecht had found a way to truth in Marxism: 'Brecht is relevant in a situation of hunger and starvation. He must be taken to the villages, to the masses.'

While Dr. Erken objected, 'No play but *The Threepenny Opera* was written for the masses,' Shyamanand Jalan found the value of Brecht in



Gondi or The Caucasian Chalk Circle by Shetabdi, directed by Badal Sircar.

his understanding of the universality of the human situation. 'The richness of the distance', he said, 'is destroyed when Brecht is Indianized.'

Badal Sircar, intervening from the floor, asked the directors to estimate the expenditure of their productions. While Raina put his expenses for *The Mother* at Rs. 13,000, Vijaya Mehta said that she had spent Rs. 700 on *The Good Person of Setzuan* and Rs. 1,000 on *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Sircar drew a very useful distinction between the different definitions that a 'village' had in different parts of India, and voiced his doubts about the relevance of a Brecht play in a West Bengal village.

M. K. Raina gave an account of his slow approach to Brecht. He began with an account of his experience of war in his home state, Kashmir: 'War was a living experience for me in Kashmir where I grew up. I counted the trucks in military convoys. It was fun till the day I saw a convoy with wounded soldiers. I started hating war and soldiers. At the National School of Drama I couldn't connect myself with the courses. But it was at the school that I discovered Brecht's poems. I read a lot through one night, especially *The Worker Reads History*, then I got interested in his plays.' Recounting his experience of working with Carl Weber on his production of *The Caucasian*

*Chalk Circle* at the National School of Drama, Raina said, 'He came from a different soil altogether. None of us enjoyed the way he directed it. When we read Brecht's plays, we liked them more. He demanded facilities that we could not provide him with. He was unhappy all the time. Only after he had left we understood the production.' With Fritz Benewitz, who came down to direct *The Threepenny Opera* for the National School of Drama, it was entirely different. 'As a director, he was a very restless person. He was always trying to connect himself to the experience here. I spent a night with him at the Jumma Masjid. He sat talking to an old beggar; neither understood the other's language, but they understood each other. He met his Peachum one day when there was the man who sold him a cheap tricolour badge for twenty rupees. When Benewitz left, we began improvising on his work, which he accepted when he came back on a second visit.' Through his experiences later with Brecht's short plays and *The Mother*, Raina has come to feel, 'We take messages from him, ideas from him, but we must evolve our own grammar. Brecht is relevant only when we have our own Brechts.'

Jabbar Patel, in his account of his production of *Teen Paishacha Tamasha*, said that P. L. Deshpande, who had adapted *The Threepenny Opera* for him, had allowed him liberties. He found in Brecht's script the looseness that was to be found in the Marathi *tamasha*. His sutradhara, havaladar, and Vishnu, all came from the *tamasha*. His production began as a *tamasha*.

Arturo Ui in Bengali by Theatre Unit, directed by Sekhar Chatterjee





but with the appearance of Ankush-Macheath, he found a character 'from the West, for the gangster is not an Indian type'. Therefore he gave Ankush the dramatic element of the Rock. Mrinal Sen intervened to point out that the gangster as he appears in Patel's production is more 'an Indian cinema stereotype' than a Western character. In the discussion that followed, there were several detractors who complained that Patel had 'commercialized' Brecht. While Patel argued that such complaints come only from those who had missed the language, he agreed with me when I intervened to say that his production should be regarded as a musical take-off from Brecht's script rather than a treatment of that script, and should be, therefore, judged on its merits and not as a Brecht production as such.

A session devoted to recordings of songs from Brecht's plays from the original production followed by versions from the Indian productions of the same plays, sung by artistes from the Theatre Academy, Pune, and Theatre Unit, Nandikar, Nandimukh, Chetana and Ansamika Kala Sangam, demonstrated the inevitable distance between musical patterns and tones. Musically, the Theatre Academy presentation proved to be the richest and the most energetic; the Ansamika Kala Sangam's was the poorest, and Chetana's the most dramatic.

A session of films and video shows organized as part of the programme featured a version of the classic *Mother Courage* with Helene Weigel, *Senora Carrar's Rifles* with Hanne Flob, Brecht's daughter, two British films affected and considerably moulded by Brecht's ideas, Lindsay Anderson's *If* and Joseph Losey's *The King and the Country*, and the Slatan Dudow-Brecht film *Kuhle Wampe*, shown in India for the first time. Located in the Germany of the early thirties, it is a film in four parts organized in terms of a simple piece of logic. The first part uses the newly discovered Russian technique of montage to present the problem of unemployment through the repeated images of men cycling through the city in search of jobs, the wheels often assuming the ominous dimensions of an enormous futility. The second part concentrates on a family and a member of the family, a young man who commits suicide on learning that the unemployment dole has been stopped. Brecht-Dudow connects the suicide through an easy glide to the increased urgency of relief as the family faces it. The third part gives a temporary escape with the family finding a precarious foothold in a suburban camping colony and the young girl finding a lover. The happy haven is exploded in a drunken engagement party which breaks up the relationship between the girl and the lover. The fourth part reunites them at a workers' spartakiad and controversy in a railway carriage links the experience to the economic issues that affect the world and Germany at the same time. Songs in the Brechtian manner and the solidity of the documentary make *Kuhle Wampe* an unusual achievement. It was interesting to see *Kuhle Wampe* and Pabst's *The Threepenny Opera* together. In spite of Brecht's objections to Pabst's film and his legal resistance, it still gave glimpses of the spirit of the early Brecht that Brecht himself was rejecting as he worked on *Kuhle Wampe*.

The highlight of *Bertolt Brecht 80* was of course the schedule of plays in Indian languages, with the Marathi *Threepenny Opera* by Theatre

Academy, Pune, Theatre Unit's *Arturo Ui*, *Puntile* and *Breadshop* in Bengali, Shatabdi's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in Bengali, Prayog's *Mother* in Hindi, and several of the shorter plays in Bengali by different groups. Of the Theatre Unit productions, *Arturo Ui* and *Puntile* were revivals that had been recognized for long as close approximations to the Brechtian style, with the former following very closely the visual imagery of the Berliner Ensemble production. *Teen Paishacha Tamashe* had an overwhelmingly powerful impact with its mix of the folk and the Rock in the music and the earthy strength of the acting, but there were critics who complained that it had considerably washed away the political nuances of the original. It was more a musical reconstruction of the original than an interpretation of the Brecht text. Shatabdi's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* was, in a sense, the most interesting experiment, for Badal Sircar, recasting the Brecht script in terms of his intimate arena theatre in his lecture hall auditorium, retained more of the essential Brecht than the more spectacular versions of the same play seen in Calcutta. The several performances scheduled for the last week of the programme that got washed out by the heavy rains and the great Calcutta flood included the second show of M. K. Raina's *Mother* for Prayog (which I had missed at the first show), Tritirtha's *Galileo*, Chetana's *The Good Person of Setzuan*, and two versions of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

While the outstation theatre groups generally draw larger crowds, there were few who felt the need to have a close look at the entire range of productions presented together for the first time, and do a little bit of re-thinking on Brecht and his place in the Indian theatre. The excellent exhibition that used posters, stills, models, and slogans from Brecht to present Brecht and his associates in their historical and physical setting and provide a documentary presentation of Brecht's theatre did not draw the crowds it should have drawn. There were lapses in the publicity campaign that the Max Mueller Bhavan had designed, but one felt a little disheartened to find so few takers for such a massive presentation on Brecht.

The free passes for the film shows were exhausted almost the very day they were made available, while tickets for the plays sold sluggishly. One could understand how and why the more sensationalized and corrupted and liquefied versions of Brecht plays generally found a ready acceptance with audiences. One would still like to know if it is the same way in other Indian cities too!

*Bhavai Festival, Morvi, May 10-17, 1979*

A unique Bhavai festival and a seminar were organized at Morvi from May 10-17, 1979, by the Research Wing of the Indian National Theatre (I.N.T.), in collaboration with the Rashtriya Seva Mandal (Rajkot) and the Hirji Keshavji Bhavai Mandali of Morvi. Nearly 250 Bhavai artistes and a large number of scholars attended the festival and took part in the deliberations. A few scholarly papers were read, followed by demonstrations of various aspects of the traditional folk theatre.

The word Bhavai has several interpretations. *Bhava* means life. *Bhava* also indicates sentiment and *vahi* suggests a carrier or a diary. So Bhavai could mean the carrier of life, expressive of sentiment or a diary of

*Daglo, the jester*



*Motilal Parsana*

life. Bhavai originated in the early years of the fifteenth century A.D. Poet Asait Thakore (of Unjha), a Brahmin of the *Audichya* clan, recited scriptures, singing the texts and explaining their meanings to the devotees gathered in the temples in North Gujarat.

His descendants continued to practise the art of Bhavai. He is said to have written nearly 360 playlets, some of which are performed even today. They are known as *Vesha-s* or *Swang-s*. The better known among these are *Jhanda Jhoodan*, *Chhel-Batau*, *Juthanmiyan*, *Ramadeva*, *Purabiya*. The most popular ones are *Kejoda*, *Marawaran*, *Mian-bibi*, *Vanzaro* and *Mohana rani*. They reflect social mores and are a biting satire on the injustices suffered by the poor.

A throbbing and a living theatre, the Bhavai of Gujarat is a type of the regional folk theatre that developed after the tenth century A.D. all over

India with the parallel development of regional languages. It retains several links with Sanskrit theatre and belongs to the class of the *Uparupaka* varieties of dance-dramas that developed in the post-Bharata period.

The Bhavai is performed in an open space demarcated by the Naik and it is called *paudh* or *chacher*. It is performed as a votive offering to the goddess Shakti, variously known as Ambamata, Bhavani and Bahucharamata. The performances are staged during the Navaratri festival. Though it has a religious origin, Bhavai also has secular themes which highlight social injustices and ethical values through the medium of playlets.

The character of *Daglo* or *Rangalo* reminds one of the *Vidushaka*, and suggests a link with classical Sanskrit drama. Like the *Vidushaka*, the *Daglo* of the Bhavai takes liberties with the text, and admonishes the hero and the heroine and at times also criticizes the audiences. He is full of humour; he elucidates the Puranas; he elaborates upon the main theme of the performance in his own inimitable style. He is extremely popular with the spectators.

The most impressive aspect of Bhavai is the entry of the character in the performing arena. Known as *avanu* (entry), it follows the same tradition

*Jhanda Jhoolan played by Kashiram Vyas*



of the *petra-pravesh daru* of the dance-drama tradition. Two stage hands hold a piece of curtain behind which the actor stands, sings and dances and at the right time the curtain is removed. This has a heightened theatrical significance. Very often the character enters with a torch in one hand or sometimes with two torches, one in each hand, and dances. For example, in the *vesha* of *Juthanmiyan*, Juthan's beloved enters with two burning torches in her hands and both the lovers dance together and recite couplets. On a dark night the faces are lit by the torches and the moving figures and lights create a fascinating spectacle.

Though Bhavai is performed to propitiate the mother-goddess Shakti, there are Vaishnavite themes like *Kan-Gopi*, *Danlila* and *Rasalila* which are equally popular. Hirji Keshavji Bhavai Mandal's enactment of these numbers was an experience to remember. There was not a dull moment. Traditionally the female roles are impersonated by male actors as in most folk theatre forms elsewhere. A Bhavai actor is a versatile performer, trained in music, dance and acting. He dons female costumes and performs with consummate artistry. Manilal Vyas in the role of Radha, Gopi and Yashoda left an indelible impression. The range of his singing was astonishing. He possesses a uniform excellence whether in acting, dancing or singing. His *abhinaya* in *Mohana rani* and *Mahiyari* was unforgettable. As a matter of fact, the whole troupe is quite outstanding and has a fine repertoire. The enactment of *Jasma Oden*, the popular folk tale, with its exquisite marriage scene (complete with two sides singing marriage songs, announcing gifts to the bride and the bridegroom, involving an element of audience participation, when members of the audience announce the customary *chandla*), was exciting to watch. Similarly, when *Jasma* commits *sati*, the intense emotional involvement and the trance-like experience suggested the power of this folk theatre.

The seminar was quite a revelation. It brought to light their training methods; the *raga-s* and *ragini-s* employed by the singers and the supporting vocalists; the convention of the *jhilavewalla-s*; the complex foot-work; the playing of the *bhungala* (the long pipe-like instrument that electrifies the atmosphere); and, of course, the voice culture. The demonstrations were a rewarding experience.

It was suggested that the INT should start a Bhavai centre at Morvi with facilities for training, research and study. The Central Sangeet Natak Akademi recorded various aspects of the Bhavai performances for seven nights on tape and film. This should provide sufficient research and study material for scholars.

This festival focussed attention on the form that is prevalent in the Machhukantha area. The tradition in North Gujarat also deserves a similar festival and a seminar. The variations and similarities can then be studied with advantage. The contemporary artiste has much to learn and adopt from the Bhavai technique since the vitality of the form is amazing and the performance pulsates with life.

—SUNIL KOTHARI

*Rang Yatra: A theatre on wheels for the slum children of Bombay*

While passing through the Dharavi slum and observing the children of the locality gaping at the images of Amitabh Bacchan & Co. on the huge screen of the drive-in theatre at Bandra, a thought invariably came to mind: How would it be if a genuine live theatre, with children's plays and puppets, with music, mime and dance, came to these areas to entertain these children?

The project—Rang Yatra—a mobile theatre going from community to community to provide an outlet to have fun with the children of Bombay slums—emerged out of such musings.

It took concrete shape when the publicity committee of the Bal Varsha Pratishthan—a Citizens' Committee formed on the occasion of the International Year of the Child—adopted the scheme as one of its projects and as part of its efforts to focus attention on the physical, emotional and cultural needs of the deprived child. The Pratishthan provided us with the resources, organisation and the active help of the social welfare groups of the localities.

We decided to have a session of four performances in a particular area and then move on to the next: A gaily decorated mobile truck which is promptly converted into a simple stage—without the paraphernalia of sets, lights, drop curtain, wings etc. Parked in an open space, it would present value-based entertainment, children's plays and puppet shows, music, dance, mime and even poetry sessions by leading children's theatre groups of Bombay.

Our aim was not only to provide entertainment to appreciative but silent spectators, but also to draw the children within the rhythm and action of the actual performance. So we decided to give our theatre a different personality, a different atmosphere. We wanted to establish an immediate rapport with the slum children (800—1,000 was our usual attendance), the majority of whom were probably exposed to theatre for the first time in their lives.

We adopted some of our Indian theatre traditions. The presentation was done by two young actors, who as Sutradharas maintained a continuous pace and rapport with the audience. The performance began with a Purvarangam marking the stage area, and establishing the concept of a theatre as an audio-visual art, presenting the eight *rasa*-s for the joy of the spectators. To sing, dance and act in the open air, for a duration of an hour and half demands a fund of energy and strong lungs. So we made it a point to choose young artistes. (One of them, Sunil Shanbaug, is a drummer in addition). For the main items we were fortunate enough to get fantastic co-operation from most of the leading children's theatre groups of Bombay: Ratnakar Matkari, Shanta Gandhi, Sulabha Deshpande, Namdev Lahute, Vanlata Mehta, Balodyan, Municipal Sangita Natak Academy and many others helped us.

The first performance of Rang Yatra, after all these preparations, took place on the afternoon of April 18, 1979 at the Lotus Colony of Gowandi, Bombay. And since then we have completed a session of four shows in that colony.



There was a bit of initial apprehension regarding the attitude of the young audiences to our theatre. But from the moment the show started, the children's attention was rivetted on the stage; their reactions were instantaneous and uninhibited. The effect on the performers was electrifying. The unsophisticated reaction of an audience consisting of a thousand odd children was deeply moving and enriching, and specially so when a group of them decided to do an item of their own and join us in our Rang Yatra.

The next set of our four programmes is scheduled to be held in the Mazgaon area.

And the intention is to continue the movement—Rang Yatra—throughout this year and for 'years to come'.

—TARLA MEHTA



*Prithvi Theatre: a theatre of possibilities*

Opened just a few months ago, the Prithvi Theatre, built by Shashi Kapoor in memory of his father, Prithviraj Kapoor, founder of Prithvi Theatres and a giant of the Indian screen, nestles unassuming in a quiet corner of Juhu. The entire project evolved or grew through various stages at a total cost of about Rs. 12 lakhs. At first the idea was to demolish the existing structure and have a theatre with dubbing and recording facilities, to make it self-supporting. Fortunately, this idea was dropped and it was then decided to use the existing structure by merely replacing the old timber roof with an AC sheet at very little cost. On closer examination it was discovered that the building was in such a bad condition that nothing short of a completely new building would suffice. It was finally decided to make the Theatre completely up to date with air-conditioning as an additional bonus!

The informal way in which the various aspects of the Theatre developed is symbolic, in a sense, of the purpose for which it has been built. The key words are, intimacy and experimentation. The seating which encircles a thrust stage can accommodate about 250 people, at a pinch. The size of the stage can be increased or decreased by removing the rostrums. The AC ducts have been fitted with specially designed silencers to reduce noise. Special attention has been paid to acoustics. The roofing of precast concrete slabs and a false ceiling of insulated plaster-of-paris cuts out the outside noise. Since artificial amplification of sound is not desired, the volume of the hall has been carefully calculated to optimally contain and distribute the sound energy of the speech of the actor. The sound absorption panels are designed to give the most suitable reverberation time for speech. By turning them around they are designed to give the most suitable reverbera-

tion time for music. As a result the acoustics are reported to be as near perfect as possible.

A fixed cyclorama—an unusual feature—has been provided to help 'under-privileged groups' who are unable to afford sets. What is highly commendable is that the entire effort is indigenous—right from the planning and design to all the equipment installed. That is, of course, if we do not consider Jennifer Kapoor, who nurtured the project through its two years of execution, as a 'foreign technician'!

Initially the rent of the theatre was fixed at a truly revolutionary rate!! There was a charge of Re. 1 only for every ticket sold! This could really have given a great impetus to experimental theatre activity, freeing the groups from undue preoccupation with gate returns. Unfortunately hard economic facts have forced the theatre itself to charge a fixed rental from April this year. Even so, Rs. 250/- per show for an air-conditioned theatre is heroically nominal. As a result the Theatre has witnessed brisk activity since it opened.

However, the Kapoors are far from complacent about the success of the Prithvi Theatre. They quite realize that there is a danger of the theatre becoming just another air-conditioned venue, "to perform at cheap rates." The number of different groups staging shows is rather low and the variety of programmes leaves something to be desired. Dance performances are rare, and there has been not a single classical music performance to date. Most of the plays are of a conventional nature, which do not take advantage either of the thrust stage or the intimate encircling nature of the audience. One obvious reason for this is, of course, the lack of any other similar stage to perform such specially designed plays.

More disturbing though appears to be the fact that the Theatre has begun operating as a building but not yet as an institution or movement. While the ideals that prompted the building of Prithvi Theatre are admirable, attention must be paid to the inspirational and organizational framework that is still lacking and which alone can make the Prithvi Theatre a fitting tribute to the pioneering genius of Prithviraj Kapoor. The Theatre has not yet been organized to run as an instrument of experiment and change through a self-supporting repertory theatre, which could also spread the message by performing throughout the country. Moreover, those in charge of day-to-day management are not quite in contact yet with new developments and talent in the performing arts, so as to ensure that the best and most exciting work is presented here.

Large numbers of creative artistes and performers live in the vast suburbs of Bombay. They need, and would in fact welcome, a convenient and sympathetic forum for flexing their creative muscles. Through seminars, discussions, lectures, promotion of talent and the founding of a permanent repertory group, the Prithvi Theatre could, and should, take steps to convert itself from a mere 'space' to a focus of creative innovation and leadership in the performing arts. Till then, its great possibilities will remain only partly realized.

—SIDDHARTH KAK



Madam,

I have some relevant points to make regarding Durga Bhagvat's review of my book, *A Bibliography of Indian Folk Literature*. The review was published in the March issue of the Journal. Miss Bhagvat seems to feel that by including some entries which, strictly speaking, belong to "folklore" and not to "folk literature"—an operational scheme I devised for the *Bibliography*—I have violated my own established norm. Then she quickly cites some examples to prove her point (pp. 58-59). It is most unfortunate that she seems to overlook the basic function of our operational scheme of separating "folk literature" from "folklore", which was devised (i) to delimit the areas which we were going to cover and (ii) to avoid the pitfalls of controversy around the terms "folk literature" and "folklore", particularly "folklore". Under such circumstances, definitions apart, even forming itemized lists becomes impossible. This seems more true in India than anywhere else. For instance, according to her, Agarkar's book: *Folk Dances of Maharashtra* (Item No. 17), which I have included in the *Bibliography* and annotated as: songs, Marathi, ought not to have been included in the volume under review as it belonged to the "folklore" category and not "folk literature". She also adds: ["Now this book is primarily on dances and games, and songs are included as an accessory to the dance (emphasis mine)]. Suffice it to say that some songs are included in the book, and, therefore, according to my operational scheme the item could not be excluded from the *Bibliography*.

It is most unfortunate that Durga Bhagvat has not even glanced through my *Bibliography* with a keen scholarly eye. Otherwise she would not have said that I was "dishonest" in listing periodicals such as: *KFQ* (*Key-Folklore Quarterly*, Pennsylvania), *CAP* (*Contemporary Arts in Pakistan, Dacca*), *CL* (*Chinese Literature, Peking*), *Ethnomusicology*, (Midletown, U.S.A.), *MWF* (*Midwest Folklore, Bloomington*), *MUSQ* (*Musical Quarterly*, New York), *NCF* (*North Carolina Folklore, North Carolina*) and *RD&E* (*Revista De Ethnografia, Portugal*) and not giving any items from them in the real body of the *Bibliography*. This is totally untrue. Had she displayed more scholarly patience and glanced through the book she would have found these periodicals listed as item numbers: 3868 (p. 382), 3583 (p. 355), 3317 (p. 329), 1777 (p. 176), 604 (p. 59), 1778 (p. 176), 3872 (p. 383), 3758 (p. 372), etc. This clearly shows that Durga Bhagvat, in calling me "dishonest", has been less than fair to me.

Dr. JAWAHARLAL HANDOO  
Folklore Unit,  
Central Institute of Indian Languages,  
Manasagangotri,  
Mysore 570 006.

MANIPURI NARTANA by Darshana Jhaveri and Kalavati Devi, Choukhamba Orientalia, Varanasi, 1978, Rs. 15.00 (*In Hindi*).

GURU BIPIN SINGH by Nayana Jhaveri, Manipuri Nartanalaya, Calcutta, 1979 (*In English*).

Manipuri culture, particularly the culture of the Manipuris of the valley, presents an exciting field for the exploration of the Mongoloid contribution to Indian culture. But the stage of research in this field is still in its infancy and we have to depend a great deal on the findings of a few British officers and Indian scholars whose knowledge about this area and its people is naturally inadequate. But a few local scholars of Manipur are now engaged in a fascinating search for the roots of this *Kirata* people, who were Sanskritised centuries ago, and form almost a part, so to say, of greater India. There is considerable evidence of Shaivite culture and a Tantric cult in the early history of Manipur. It is found in the various Puranas and old texts in the Manipuri script (but not the existing Assamese-Bengali script) and constitutes a rich literary heritage. Hence, any conclusion, relating to this culture, can only come through the process of research and will be, by its very nature, tentative. What is known now as the classical heritage of Manipuri dance will have to be confined to the Sankirtana tradition of the 18th century.

This book does not claim to be a scholarly work. Written by two distinguished dancers under the guidance of their guru, Bipin Singh, this small work of 120 pages is meant to be a brief introduction to Manipuri dances and almost a basic text for young learners of this distinctive form of classical Indian dance. It is a brief yet comprehensive survey of the various facets of Manipuri dance, namely the history of the dances, Lai-Haraoba, Nata-Sankirtana, Rasleela; the classical texts on Indian dance; the *hasta-s*, the *tala-s* of the Manipuri Pung and their various aspects. It describes the costumes with illustrations and traces the genealogy of the Manipuri gurus of Rasleela. The introduction of Rasleela is the strong point of the book; but the Lai-Haraoba and Sankirtana traditions have not received adequate treatment. The treatment of the 64 *rasa-s* of Vaishnava aesthetics is yet another strong point of this work and the discussion of the classical *tala-s* is a scholarly contribution to an understanding of Manipuri music and dance. The life efforts of Guru Bipin Singh have been associated with this task.

I have now only two observations to make. The authors depend far too much on a scholarly work in Sanskrit, *Govinda Sangeet Leela Vilas*, attributed to Rajarshi Bhagyachandra, for the classification of classical Manipuri music and dance. But it is a controversial work, and its authorship and very existence is being challenged by a strong section of Manipuri scholars and gurus. Besides it is difficult to understand why the authors refer to the language as *Meitei* language and not Manipuri language. The Manipuris call them-

selves *Meiteis*, but that is another matter. In which case, the title of the book itself should have been *Meitei Nartana*. But the Manipuri language is universally known as such and it has even been recognised by the Sahitya Akademi and various Indian universities.

On the whole, the book is a readable and dependable introduction to Manipuri dance. There are very few books of this kind in India on this subject and the efforts of the young authors deserve appreciation and recognition.

The next book under review is a loving tribute paid to Guru Bipin Singh by his chief disciple, the celebrated exponent of Manipuri dance, Nayana Jhaveri. Besides being a sympathetic study of the life of the guru, it is also a compilation of the various tributes paid to him by the scholars and gurus of Manipur and other regions. It has a number of photographs and provides an interesting commentary on the life of Guru Bipin Singh, who has been able to carve out almost a *gharana* of his own in which the rich classical traditions have been blended with the demands of the modern stage: a feat difficult to achieve.

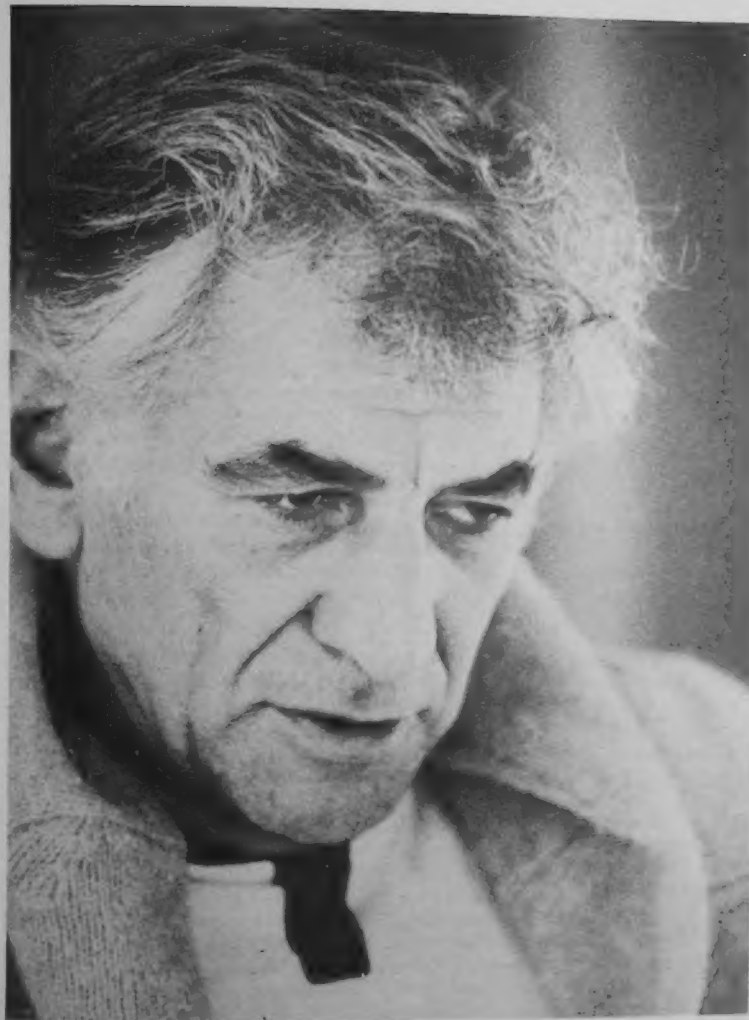
—E. NILAKANTA SINGH

---

THE UNANSWERED QUESTION. Six Talks at Harvard by Leonard Bernstein, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1976, \$20.00 (*In English*).

*The Unanswered Question* is a fascinating document which grew out of the six Norton lectures that Leonard Bernstein gave at Harvard a few years ago. These lectures, says Bernstein, "were intended to be experienced aurally, accompanied by visual aids and extended orchestral performances on a film screen, plus a near-continuous stream of musical illustration at the piano—with never a care for how it might all look some day on the printed page. And with never a care for literary niceties, since it was all to be delivered in the rather casual atmosphere of the Harvard Square Theater, ad-libs and all, to an audience so mixed (students, nonstudents, the cop on the corner, distinguished faculty, my mother, experts in music who cared little for linguistics, vice versa, scientists with no interest in poetry, vice versa) that any one precise level of diction was unthinkable. The interdisciplinary nature of the material further discouraged stylistic consistency. All in all, not exactly the recipe for an academic publication".

It is precisely this that gives the book character and a distinctive, often distinguished style of its own. Precise levels of diction and stylistic consistency are minor virtues, part of the discipline of rhetoric. Style, articulation, easy and happy communication are derived from authority, confidence, clear thinking. Of course it is impossible to transfer to the printed word the significant gesture, the controlled rhythm, the subtle



crescendos, the diminuendos that a great conductor like Bernstein can bring even to speech. But even in the printed word, his transitions in style and language from moods of casual conversation to passages of great emotional intensity (his references to Mahler for instance) are as smooth as his work as a conductor with a baton in his hands. He has other special

qualities. He can be light and serious in turn, and yet always serenely poised whether he has his eye on the cop round the corner or the distinguished faculty. And he has an uncanny pedagogic flair when he deals with concepts like musical phonology or syntax or semantics.

The title of the book is borrowed from Charles Ives, the American composer who wrote a piece called "The Unanswered Question" as far back as 1908. Perhaps Ives was asking a question: "Whither music?" as Musical Man entered the twentieth century. "The purpose of these lectures", says Bernstein, "is not so much to answer the question as to understand it, to redefine it . . . It would be pretentious to assume that . . . we will answer the ultimate question; but it is reasonable to assume that we will be in a better position to make some educated guesses".

It was Noam Chomsky, ten years younger than Leonard Bernstein, linguist, writer, founder of what we might call 'transformational or generative grammar', who led Bernstein to this quest. Chomsky was the founder of what can be described as "an innovative system of language analysis that revolutionised the study of linguistics". Bernstein gave himself up to Chomsky lock, stock and barrel. Even his family had to bear "with cheerful martyrdom (his) first year of nonstop euphoria at (his) discovery of the Chomsky connection".

And so we get a musical-linguistic quest on the trail of something — a brilliant, innovative, creative quest, searching, questioning, analysing the connection between music and linguistics if there is any, almost creating it if it isn't there. It is a mixture of philosophic speculation and logistics. It starts off with an examination of the terms Phonology, Syntax, Semantics.

What is phonology? It is the science of vocal sounds, the phonetic features, the conditions in which language can exist. Then, what would be musical phonology? And syntax? It can mean the arrangement of words by which their relationship and true connection in a sentence become meaningful; the established usages of grammatical construction. What would be musical syntax? And musical semantics? Most criticism of art has to depend on literary terms. Painting, sculpture, architecture, music all borrow from literary concepts for a meaningful vocabulary. Bernstein, obviously, is well aware of all this. His approach is interdisciplinary, an unexceptional approach in all art criticism. He analyses methodically, precisely, the parallels in language and music. Some of his findings are interesting, some startling, some even revealing, but do they help us any more or any better to the understanding or the appreciation of music? Are they really relevant to serious musical criticism? Does the Mozart G Minor Symphony mean any more to me after the talk on musical phonology? And on musical syntax? I wonder. When Bernstein says, "Mozart's G Minor Symphony is such a revered treasure of our heritage that it seems sacrilegious to lay linguistic hands on it", I find it easy to agree with him. He then goes on to say—"but . . ." There I hesitate to go along.

To me, personally, the book begins to come alive much more from the fourth lecture onwards. The linguistic terminology begins to recede a little into the background. The interdisciplinary character becomes more

meaningful. The interaction of poetry and music and the other arts is clear — Berlioz and Byron, Chopin and George Sand, Schumann and Hoffman. The transition from the Romantics and heightened chromaticism via Wagner to Debussy and Mallarmé is beautifully realised.

And so we come to Schoenberg and atonality. I shall not dismiss Adorno's *The Philosophy of Modern Music* summarily. The dichotomy that he builds up was central to the musical situation in the West. Today it would seem a little dated and, as Bernstein says, anything but even-handed. And now I am on Bernstein's side. *Pierrot Lunaire* with its *Sprechstimme* is a blow against tonality. It was as if free atonality "was in itself a point of no return". A dead end? Again, I wonder. Atonal music is often controlled, as Bernstein himself says, by "rules which govern its consistent adherence to the original set of twelve-tones. In a sense, that tone row performs something like the function of a scale in tonal music". Personally I think tonality, in all musical systems the world over, is one of the fundamental truths of music, like the notes in the harmonic series, like the octave, the true fifth etc. The break-up, the disintegration of tonality, is like losing one's faith in truths which seemed infallible. But in the development of the human mind there has always been the quest for truths beyond our normal comprehension; hence let the question remain unanswered.

After having said all that let me get back to Bernstein and Mahler. Bernstein's analysis of Mahler's Ninth Symphony seems to me one of the most profound and moving examples of musical analysis that I have come across and experienced. Let me quote the last paragraph of it and there you will see what I mean:

"And so we come to the final incredible page. And this page, I think, is the closest we have ever come, in any work of art, to experiencing the very act of dying, of giving it all up. The slowness of this page is terrifying: *Adagissimo*, he writes, the slowest possible musical direction; and then *langsam* (slow), *ersterbend* (dying away), *zögernd* (hesitating); and as if all those were not enough to indicate the near stoppage of time, he adds *äusserst langsam* (extremely slow) in the very last bars, it is terrifying, and paralyzing, as the strands of sound disintegrate. We hold on to them, hovering between hope and submission. And one by one, these spidery strands connecting us to life melt away, vanish from our fingers even as we hold them. We cling to them as they dematerialize; we are holding two—then one. One, and suddenly none. For a petrifying moment there is only silence. Then again, a strand, a broken strand, two strands one . . . none. We are *half in love with easeful death . . . now more than ever seems it rich to die, to cease upon the midnight with no pain . . .* And in ceasing, we lose it all. But in letting go, we have gained everything".

As for the unanswered question of Ives, what shall we say? "I am no longer quite sure what the question is", says Bernstein, "but I do know that the answer is Yes".

—N. M.

SHOBHA GURTU: At her best . . . Side One: *Thumri*: Des; *Hori*: Pilu. Side Two: *Chaiti*, *Dadra*, *Kajri*.  
HMV ECSD 2813 (Stereo).

USTAD MUSHTAQ HUSSAIN KHAN: Great Master. Great Music. Side One: *Khayal* Gunkari. Side Two: *Khayal* Mehkani; *Thumri* Jhinjhoti.  
HMV ECLP 2573.

L. SHANKAR: Violin Ecstasy. Accompanists: Palghat T.S. Mani Iyer (Mridangam), Zakir Hussain (Tabla).  
HMV ECSD 3292 (Stereo).

With the passing away of Siddheshwari Devi, Rasoolan Bai and Begum Akhtar, *thumri*-singing in India suffered an incomparable loss. The *ghazal* and other light-classical styles were threatened with virtual extinction of voice in the alto register. The broad, rich albeit husky voice of Shobha Gurtu, however, seems to have kindled more than a flicker of hope in the minds of listeners.

In her very first long-playing disc released by EMI, she offers a *thumri* (in the Purab style in Desh) and a *hori* on one side, while the *chaiti*, *dadra* and *kajri* are presented on the other. All these pieces have the unmistakable flavour of the region of their origin. Shobha Gurtu exhibits firm tonality and lovely hues both of which are so essential to this kind of singing. She begins the *thumri* in a slightly shaky manner, but appears to find her moorings almost immediately and goes on to use a motif of two *nishad*-s in the *antara* to give us a whiff of Tilang/Malhar. Shadows of neighbouring *raga*-s are not only permitted but desirable in order to enrich the *thumri*. The *chaiti*, *dadra* and *kajri* are executed neatly, perhaps because they are shorter. They come through even better than the *thumri*. But the best piece is the *hori*, with the pining mood of Pilu brought out in full measure by the *bol*-s as well as the melodic phrasing.

Table-accompaniment by Kashinath Misra and Iqbal Ahmed's sarangi deserve mention for their good support. The name of the harmonium-player has not been mentioned in the credits. In one piece, at least, the harmonium has played a chordal harmonic accompaniment. The voice is treated by an electronically-simulated echo. The Swara Mandal is used in a patchy way. These things lend a touch of modernity, a sort of 'filmy' manner. But for some time now they have been accepted by our listeners as a means of glamorizing the music.

No such gloss is provided for Mushtaq Hussain Khan's voice in his L.P., which is released by HMV in co-operation with All India Radio. Mushtaq Hussain Khan died in 1964. He was in his eighties then. Though younger in age, he was a contemporary and perhaps a rival of masters like Alladiya Khan, Abdul Karim Khan and Faiyaz Khan. He represents the golden age of the *khayal* in India. Connected with the Gwalior and Sahaswan *gharana*-s, he was responsible for crystallizing the *khayal* in the Rampur *gharana*. The features of his singing are evident in the *khayal* Gunkari. It gives an idea of the strict and rigid frame within which singers operated half a century ago. A short *alap*, the *nomtom* and the *khayal* itself set to Roopak *tala* indicate the strong influence of the famed Rampur *dhrupad*. The *khayal*, *Damaru har kar baaja*, also sung by Atrauli singers is itself an adaptation of the *dhrupad*.

*Khayal* Mehkani (wrongly notated on the disc-cover, for it does not use a *Komal Rishabh* as mentioned there) is a beautiful blending of Kedar, Saraswati and Khamaj. This *raga* has not been heard from any other source. There is also a *thumri* in *Jhinjhoti* set to Teen *Tala* on this side. By present standards, it would appear like a *Chhota khayal*, except for the occasional use of *Shuddha Nee* and *Komal Ga* in it.

The Khansahib has been assisted by a capable voice, but this artiste has not been mentioned. A recording of immense value to historians, technically it leaves much to be desired. Certainly it should have been possible to edit and eliminate the throat-clearing sounds and the table-tuning sounds (before the beginning of the Mehkani)—unless they are thought to be necessary in order to create a nostalgic mood.

Jazz violinists are certainly as (if not more) rare as white tigers! Dr. L. Shankar, whose disc is released by EMI, is certainly unique amongst them. He must be the first violinist who has a Carnatic *sangeet* background and whose jazz is good enough to replace successfully the Frenchman in the jazz band 'SHAKTI'. He has lived in the U.S. for some time now and has been heard occasionally in India along with his two brothers in violin trio concerts.

On Side One in the *Ragam-Tanam-Pallavi* (Mohanam), and, especially in the faster section of the solo, it is apparent that Dr. Shankar has been weaned away from the Carnatic style. His control over the instrument and his technique are excellent indeed but the grace notes, *gamaka*-s and his bowing remain 'clipped'—closer to the style of Hindustani artistes. This feeling is further strengthened when we hear Zakir Hussain's tabla accompaniment. The very sound of *tabla-banyan* strongly suggests a 'Northern' mood. In the medium and fast tempo, Dr. Shankar not only uses the super high register but also does some double string playing—one string giving the *shruti*—a true measure of his mastery over technique.

The second side continues the Mohanam with a *tani-avartanam*. In an eight-minute-long span Zakir Hussain and Palghat Mani give an excellent account of themselves. They have not been able to fuse themselves

together in the *pallavi* of Mohanam, Zakir Hussain obviously finding it difficult to accompany in the Carnatic style proper. He is more himself when playing with another percussionist alone.

The *Ragamalika raga-s* have been accompanied alternately, culminating in a Ravishankar-like *Sawal-Jawab-Jhala* in Sindhu Bhairavi. The concluding *raga* Kathanakuthalam allows Dr. Shankar an opportunity to exhibit his virtuosity, which he does possess in tremendous measure . . . as John MacLaughlin, Dr. Shankar's band leader in the U.S., tells us on the jacket blurb . . . But back home in Madras they may not approve of his kind of virtuosity!

—BHASKAR CHANDAVARKAR

## NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

Nariman Point, Bombay 400 021.

### SOME FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Programme	Date	Venue
1. Christiaan Bor (Violin) Marja Bon (Pianoforte) (In association with the Time and Talents Club)	14/9/79	Patkar Hall
2. Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma (Kuchipudi—Lecture Demonstration)	17/10/79	N.C.P.A. Auditorium
3. Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma ( <i>Bhama Kalapam</i> —Kuchipudi Dance Drama)	18/10/79	Tejpal Auditorium
4. 66-member Ballet Troupe from the USSR (In association with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations)	31/10/79 & 1/11/79	Homi Bhabha Auditorium
5. Chhau Dance of Seraikella	16/11/79	Tejpal Auditorium

Published by J. J. Bhabha for the National Centre for the Performing Arts, Bombay House, Bombay 400 023.—Edited by Dr. Kumud Mehta and printed by M. N. Palswankar at the Tata Press Ltd., 414 Veer Savarkar Marg, Bombay 400 025.

Reg. No. 24073/73